MASKS

By

EMIL FRIEND

03705
+52
2.
1
50

Ethel D. Mayo

"Beaupassant had remained considerately silent—he noticed Laura was absorbed in observation."—Page 275.

MASKS

A NOVEL

BY

EMIL FRIEND.

CHICAGO, ILL.
GEO. W. OGILVIE & CO., Publishers
1905

COPYRIGHT 1905 BY GEO. W. OGILVIE.

MASKS

CHAPTER I.

THEY MEET.

"If you were not a teacher what would you like to be?"

Ross, the hotel manager was passing. He heard the question, and before the Jewess could answer, interjected: "Married."

"And then you would pursue me as you do all married women," was the quick retort flung from the nervous mouth at the big fellow whose cynical leer changed to a scowl. When he was out of hearing the dark, wiry woman spoke earnestly: "I should like to be an actress. The theatre is the place for bright women. If I had your figure—your presence—and my ambition I'd be on the stage. For awhile it is hard work, but the rewards are immense for a clever person. A beautiful woman who can act never so little can command almost any salary. She is somebody, too. She isn't buried like the rest of us among the common heap."

Her running thoughts uncovered a poignant wish that, plainly, had not been deeply buried, and the desire impossible of attainment was shown by a drawn face which changed to positive ugliness as she made the transition to her own employment:

"Oh, how I hate teaching! It has taught me to loathe children. I sometimes fear the thing will drive me mad. If it were not for the two months' vacation which I spend abroad I think I'd be driven to suicide.

2135591

But what am I to do? My folks are poor and I can't do anything at the theatre—my appearance is against me."

Laura professed not to agree with the severe self-criticism. She urged that Miss Rosenau had a strong face and that a petite form—

The Jewess interrupted savagely: "I tried several times, but they wouldn't have me. I took instructions from Clarence Protony at the Conservatory for six months. I went every afternoon after school hours. He assured me that I was full of talent and would make a big hit; but after Carl Gars—who is the whole thing in the theatrical world—told me that I was nothing but a bundle of bones I stopped trying. And that was my reward after four weeks of persistent trying to see him—nothing but 'a bundle of bones'."

She stopped and there was an embarrassing pause for Laura, who feared it were useless even by way of courtesy to contradict the judgment of the influential manager. Miss Rosenau surveyed Laura with an envious look: "If I had your face and figure I could get an engagement in a minute. But that's just it; people who have all the qualifications will have nothing to do with the stage."

With a carelessness which was not a reflex of her deep interest Laura asked:

"Who did you say was your instructor?"

"Clarence Protony. He's at the Illinois Conservatory. It's really a musical college founded by Max Blumenthal; but Protony has built up the dramatic department to some importance. His class gives a performance in the afternoon, once a month at one of the theatres. The newspapers write it up. Phelon of *The Forum* and Burrows of *The Interior* gave me splendid notices. I'll show them to you some day. I've preserved every one of them."

This talk implanted an intention in Laura, but of which she gave no hint to Rebecca Rosenau at the time. She would go about the matter quietly without consulting anybody in the hotel, an independent resolve that was sustained within an hour by the receipt of a check

from Ralph Darnby together with a penciled line reading: "I'm broke, but I borrowed this to help you along. May not be able to do anything for you again." There was a considerable surplus after she had paid the hotel bill. Her gratification in paying the debt was increased by Ross being present. He seemed displeased rather than pleased when she asked the amount against her. The genuine convenience of having money impressed itself forcibly upon her at that moment and she was determined to have money, without which, she perceived, dignity and independence were impossible.

Next day, with no thought of fame, no artistic impulse, Laura stood before a double-door entrance, high, broad, with letters imposingly large, announcing: "Illinois Conservatory." She entered and found herself in a reception room in the midst of which was a small, round transparent compartment labeled "Cashier," enclosing a pretty girl of Irish beauty, with a large ledger on one side of her and a huge cash box on the other, both conspicuously employed. Chairs in every variety were scattered about with a carefully studied carelessness. In the center, a long, narrow table littered with periodicals devoted to music and the drama.

"Mr. Protony," said Laura simply.

The pretty Irish girl touched a button. She did it mechanically, as one who poses an empty question without expecting an answer. After a time—that seemed to be fixed in her mind—she descended from the stool and in a routine way went to one of the numerous doors.

"As soon as you are at leisure, Mr. Protony." Her voice sounded like a mechanical doll.

Laura understood that the girl was her own manager and that she had touched the unconnected buttons to impress visitors and prospective pupils.

Apparently Mr. Protony was very busy. He did not show himself for some time and when he appeared Laura was disappointed. She had pictured to herself a tall, distinguished gentleman of commanding mien, and saw a small man of slight stature, but straight and

well-knit; the head of intelligent form, admirably poised, which was, however, qualified by an anxious face with deep furrows on either side of the mouth; the eyes were protean green, restive; the complexion like the hair, dull écru. He advanced toward Laura and bowed gracefully. "I'm Clarence Protony." Though the accent was neat, the enunciation pellucid and the register low, the tone was thin and, like his hair and complexion, dull écru.

Laura was direct. "I want to qualify myself for the stage, Mr. Protony."

He again took her in. Her directness was unusual in his experience and the use of the verb "qualify" arrested him. Her beauty was a subordinate consideration—his eyes long had been satiated with that satiating quality.

"May I ask you to step in here, Miss—"

He stopped and Laura finished: "Mrs. Dranby." She emphasized "Mistress"—which, to be sure, was pronounced "Misses."

They entered a narrow, exiguous room which two chairs and an escritoire almost filled. The walls were dotted with magazine and newspaper cuts of actors and playwrights. The escritoire was near a window and the visitor's chair faced the light—a daylight glare that defined Laura's face pronouncedly to Protony, who scrutinized her closely before he asked: "Have you decided what line you wish to take up—comedy or tragedy?"

"No, sir; I have no choice."

"Mrs. Darnby, it is necessary—for your advantage—to be confiding, and I hope you will accept my questions in the spirit in which they are asked—it will expedite matters and it will enable me to outline your course readily." He said it abstractedly as one who repeats a formula. With more interest he continued: "What has prompted you to the stage? Is it a love of the art? Or do you wish to distinguish yourself in some way? Are you sure it isn't vanity which brings you here? Are you leading a humdrum life that you can no longer endure."

His tone was now soft, caressing, ingratiating even, and for the first time he met her eye frankly.

"It is neither inspiration nor vanity that brings me here; it is a wish to be independent, to earn a livelihood."

Protony divined, but he asked: "Then you are not a widow, Mrs. Darnby?"

She briefly answered "No."

He turned to his desk with: "Excuse me," and was busy for a moment or two making notations. Then he got her name in full and her residence, concluding: "Have you read or seen many plays?"

"Very few."

"How fortunate! You will have nothing to unlearn." His smile was veiled.

"It is evident," he added a moment later, "that you have a good education."

"Well, I have a knowledge of varicus things without being learned."

"An education is not an insurmountable disadvantage in dramatic art." A shadow of a smile again flitted across his deadly earnest countenance. He rose, a sign that the necessary preliminaries had ended. In opening the door he added in an after-thought way: "Our terms are twenty-five dollars for thirty lessons, taken in class. Private lessons are one dollar each. Which would you prefer, Mrs. Darnby?"

Fearing that the choice of a term would exact an immediate payment in full, she chose private instruction.

He stopped (he expected, surely, she would elect for class study), hesitated, swept her with his multigreen eyes; then, as if he had decided something of importance, stepped back to the desk and returned with a small, thin, paper-covered book.

"Take this, Mrs. Darnby. It is a one-act play. Read it carefully, and pay particular attention to the part of Mrs. Ralston. Come next Saturday."

The piece had for title "Household Spirits," written by Robert Ringold. There were four characters: A husband and a wife, an intriguer and an old servant.

The scene—there was but one—a dining hall prepared for an elaborate banquet. The wife in a sumptuous reception gown is waiting the arrival of guests. The husband, morose, is seated. She warns him not to smoke, not to disarrange the napkins and unwittingly nags him to severe protestations. Although married four months, he complains, they have not yet enjoyed an evening in seclusion.—"Company! Company! Always company!"—in their home or others' homes. A tilt ensues. He goes to the smoking room and while there the intriguer appears. The latter has been away —he is still in traveling costume—and before going to his home must pay his respects to the lady he adores —as he protests. Hearing that an invitation is awaiting him he hurries to his chamber to throw himself into the regulation evening dress. Gone, the husband reappears. The talk turns on the intriguer, whose life, the wife learns, was once saved by her husband. This disclosure of the intriguer's character dismays her and dismay is followed by contrition. The while not a carriage has drawn up to the canopy. It is now late; there must be something amiss. The butler is called—and the invitations are found in his pocket; he forgot to post them. The couple are delighted. They will dine and dance alone. The orchestra is told off to the platform, the porter is instructed not to admit the intriguer, and to the seductive tones of a Waldteufel waltz the curtain is leisurely lowered with wife and husband whirling at the entrance of the ball room.

Laura, at the end of the reading, was quite certain she had a complete picture of Mrs. Ralston, the wife. She memorized the lines with facility; her studies at the seminary had disciplined a naturally receptive mind—had schooled a retentive memory. She strove to become an intimate of the high-bred society woman. In fancy, she saw her nervous yet graceful carriage, heard her cultivated voice which, in moments of temper, rose to a rather strident key. But she perceived, the next Saturday, how difficult it was to suit action to her conception. It became patent to her that acting, like language, has a grammar which must be mas-

tered by those who would be proficient. Protony, with his hard, immobile face, illustrated every tone, every movement of Mrs. Ralston unerringly. With infinite delicacy he showed Laura how stilted, how awkward her gestures really were. Her popular pronunciation of such words as supple, novel, interested, circumstances, incomparable he corrected as if involuntarily, with fine tact, as though it were infinitesimally casual to the general instructions; and her quick ear caught the refined distinctions. In the first lesson Laura learned how much there was to be learned; in the third, how to learn; in the fifth, how to practice the knowledge acquired.

And Protony's interest in her seemingly enhanced with succeeding lessons, which he prolonged beyond the customary time. Again and again—but always tentatively and with finesse—he touched on personal matters. His discreet interrogations drew Laura, imperceptibly to herself. He soon had her brief and unhappy history. But in taking from her he gave something of himself. Primarily imparting shreds of personalities to gain them from her, he assumed the implied attitude of encouraging Laura to gratify her curiosity about himself. Thus she found he had quarreled with Archer Doyle, the autocratic manager of a highly exclusive stock company in New York; had become dissatisfied with and finally discouraged by the insignificant parts allotted to him. Although he could not conceive of a life other than that of the theatre, his ambition rose above the minutiae of the actor. He would be a maker of plays if that would further him to his supreme goal, manager of a theatre. To be an Archer Doyle, to own a theatre, to produce plays, to have a superb company—these things absolutely completed his horizon. With a woman's imagination—quickly ignited and which takes no account of difficulties—she asked why, then, did he not do as he wished? He confessed, confidentially, that he had formulated plans to that end. "My monthly matinees are attracting attention. The critics are all with me. I have indicated with my pupils what I may do with a stock

company. I have selected the site for my future theatre. I have made a list of the actors and actresses I shall engage; they are nearly all young—people whom I can mold to my ideas. I even have in mind the first play I shall produce. All is ready but the capital, and that I shall get when I'm ready to take subscriptions. But I must work cautiously and quietly. Koening, the head of this institution, also has ambitions. He's watching me; he's envious of me."

She soon knew all the details of his life. To him it seemed natural to make a confidante of her, though she had shown no particular sympathy for his aims. He interested her because of his knowledge of the profession she was studying and she accepted his friendship and confidences in a neutral mood. He might be of value to her in getting an engagement with a good company. She admitted, to herself, that her view was selfish. Not that there was anything antipathetic about him; indeed, the delicacy, the subtlety of his mind were admirable. Laura admired his refined thoughts and manners, appreciated his genuine appreciation of things aesthetic; but the vitally sympathetic element which instantly attracts some women to men Protony did not possess for Laura. Perhaps his narrow subjectivity, his eager, paramount ambition cancelled the gracious effects of his artistic temperament, which, too, seemed more effeminate than virile.

It was not long before she saw him clearly, much better than he saw her—marital experience, especially of an adverse nature, is a quickening school for some women—and her thorough ease in his presence proceeded capitally from the womanly perception that she had become something more to him than his other attractive pupils; so when, one day, he invited her to attend a Joseph Jefferson performance she was entirely prepared for the invitation and accepted it. He was, of course, a most interesting and instructive escort. His criticism of the work of Jefferson's associates was lucid and convincing; his enthusiasm over the aged

comedian—who appeared in old school comedy—was infectious. Laura was certain Protony was born for the theatre; but she did not know then to what division of the art—the art as it was understood years ago—his talents were applicable. Later—and not much later—she comprehended that he had a grace beyond the coarser understanding of the theatre of the day; that he was too intellectual to succeed as an actor; that he was too fine, too analytical, too imaginative, and, above all, too diffident to please the theatre-goer with a play; that to manage a play-house successfully he lacked mob instinct, lacked stern determination, coarse commercial traits.

Protony emerged from the stuffy house surcharged with ideas generated by the performance. To the station and in the train it was a rich flow of justly phrased comments. The minutest detail had not escaped him—he was shocked at a stage management which had not instructed a footman to take a cane from a fashionable character. Not until they came to the hotel door did his critical observations cease.

Nearing the door she was surprised to see, by the glow on the transom, that there was a light in her room. Without inserting the key in the lock she turned the knob and found Darnby jauntily seated in a rocking chair, a newspaper in hand and a cigar in mouth. He lowered the journal flippantly, and after an insolent puff, greeted her with "It's a wonder he wouldn't carry a comb with him; your hair looks as though you parted in a hurry."

She was taken back at sight of him—having thought he had done with her—but her surprise quickly made way for indignation which at once rose to hot anger, and in her heated temper a comparison flashed between the man who had just left her and the fellow who had just insulted her, and it inspired her to a diabolical retort:

"Well, what of it? You are low enough not to mind, you know."

He looked at her amazed, astonished, at her spirit, the full purport of the insult dawning upon him slowly.

For several minutes nothing was said. Laura leisurely removed her hat and wrap and Darnby looked at the floor. The impatience and irritation provoked by his long wait for her turned to an animosity, the more dangerous because of its silence.

"With whom were you? " The question was put sullenly, mandatorily. She had mistaken his mood and supposed her reply had subdued him. The tone of his question had incited her further.

"None of your business."

"It isn't, eh?" He got up. His face had changed from an expression of sullen indifference to brutal viciousness. Instinctively she made for the door and received a blow at the side of her neck. A scream from her arrested the second lunge which he was about to make. The cry shamed him to the thought of exposure, although he was heedless of her, who had leaped into the corridor, and, more dazed by the cowardice and brutality of the deed than by the effect of it, was fairly stumbling down the stairs toward the office—too lost to self-possession to think of the lift. Touseled, confused, breathless, trembling, she stood before the night clerk, who anxiously asked: "What is the matter, Mrs. Darnby? Are you ill?"

"No—no—I—I'm frightened. My hus—Mr. Darnby is intoxicated." She had enough presence of mind to correct herself in calling Darnby husband and to conceal the reason of her panic-stricken state. The clerk, experienced in all the accidents and incidents of hotel life, was prompt with the suggestion: "I can give you a room on the parlor floor."

"Yes, yes; thank you."

CHAPTER II.

THE ALLIANCE.

Sleep for a time was out of question. She tossed from side to side, her body feverish, her head a caldron of seething, disjointed thoughts. Gradually her nerves were stilled. Then she wept.

Her tears exhausted, reflection was possible—reflection of a reminiscent character. She thought of home; of the box-formed house near the seminary in the Missouri town; of the angular, brown-faced, set-mouthed mother; of the large, heavy father from whose countenance adversity had not entirely evicted manly beauty, though it had stooped the shoulders pronouncedly and had shrouded his personality with an air of sad defeat; the father who had insulted Ralph Darnby when that covert gamester had presented himself as a prospective son-in-law. She thought of the tacit consent of her mother, who had been won by Darnby's engaging manner, impressed by a name synonymous with wealth and social distinction, and who did not understand that while all men seared by immorality may lead or follow their kind in day-to-day life, the more part of such men will hesitate to welcome their kind as kin—what though Darnby had befriended the ex-merchant (ruined through speculation) by indicating the lucky stable and by loans. She, Laura, a seminary girl, knew nothing of Darnby's character at the time. She had been fascinated by the handsomely molded, black-haired, dark-eyed fellow; had been induced to elope with him who was determined upon having her as much—perhaps more—by the father's deadly opposition as by the round bosom, the sinuous waist,

the graceful hips, the warm mouth with its rich red lips and the brown, joyous eyes of the daughter.

Laura's first intimation of his character—the first of a series of lost illusions—were the days immediately subsequent to the hurriedly performed wedding ceremony in Milwaukee. Darnby had no conception of the subtle modesty, the infinite delicacy of a virgin soul, and in wanting the mere suggestion of that understanding which proceeds from the heart even more than from refinement he caused the young creature to suffer an unnamable disillusion.

From Milwaukee he took her to the Lake Side Hotel, Chicago, where he cynically acknowledged that he had been disowned by the Darnbys. Though she came to perceive his thoroughly vitiated character, she had not been wholly unhappy. To her—the country-girl—the environments were interesting. The hotel was situated quite at the extreme south end of the city; a pseudo-fashionable pension, on a huge plan, for well-paid employees and prosperous tradesmen. No transients registered there save when yellow fever became dangerously contagious in the Southern states. Then the Southerners would besiege the manager for south front rooms, on the second floor. These sociable and loquacious people would remain until the frost had extirpated the disease which had impelled them to flee northward. Otherwise, the Lake Side was given over wholly to "resident guests," as the chief clerk euphemistically phrased it. The colossal barrack-like domicile was far from the route of bagmen and travelers generally. Excluding the suburban service, no trains halted near there, though the location was admirable; acres of undulating green, studded by oak trees, the spare remains of a forest; and, in face, a wide, gravelled promenade leading to the fresh water ocean, Lake Michigan.

The prosperous merchant and his family were domiciled in suites of five and seven rooms. Childless couples of short or long terms of matrimony were contented or discontented in two or three chambers, according to the means or pecuniary disposition of the

husband. Womenless men—bachelors, widowers (grass or genuine) were happy or miserable in one bandbox, except the handsome, middle-aged, engaging and improvident profligate Doctor Goodsell, the "house physician," who managed somehow to retain three finely appointed rooms throughout an incessant confusion of his finances. Menless women—female bachelors, divorcées, authentic and spurious widows—were mostly told off each in one room. Here and there two shared an apartment, when the partnership was based on mutual despair of hopeless spinsterhood, or on the horror of nocturnal loneliness which many women feel, or —there were two examples—on the ground of economy.

The compartments—including the inner circle of rooms—were airy and sanitary, for the huge boarding-house was free on all sides from neighborly obstructions. At times the clatter and chatter—the noisy gaiety—within and the absolute silence without suggested the idea of being on board ship. The proximity of the lake heightened the illusion.

Laura made friends with mothers and daughters readily; they recognized in her the sincere amiability which is inseparable from innate goodness. Men admired her instantly and for various reasons. Women —wordly women—either treated her with an exaggerated politeness far more wounding than a direct affront—that implied envy of her beauty and disdain of her simplicity; or they were effusively affectionate —which also implied envy of her beauty and disdain of her simplicity. A few acknowledged her presence with preoccupied indifference—indicating more than the others that there is something permanently hostile in the female nature to fresh loveliness at its first appearance.

The Darnbys had two rooms fronting the lake on the third floor. On the one side were Mr. and Mrs. Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead was a professor of mathematics at the Chicago University; a mild, slender, unimpressive man, a strange contrast to his large, dark and sanguineous wife, who herself was a physical contradiction in having a perfectly shaped head, from

which issued a soft, refined voice, with features of classic regularity, connecting a form gross in bulk and proportion. On the other side were Miss Carr and Miss Rosenau, preceptresses.

In the evening, when Darnby was in the card room, Laura spent some time in the company of the school teachers, who were well educated, traveled and worldly; at ease in men's society, fond of the theatre and liberal amusements, yet, withal, sternly circumspect in morals and manners. Men—young and old—sought the privilege of making one of a circle that assembled in these women's quarters, where there was a mutual diversion of a kind not too vulgar. For Laura, association with the couple had been in a sense educational. She got a broader, a more accurate view of the average city man and woman, though the knowledge had not exactly heightened her esteem for men. She had at once admired and feared Mrs. Whitehead, who was better than a mediocre musician, was an enjoyable conversationalist, and who, when it pleased her, could be almost refined. It was the Jewess, with penetrating eye, who, by degrees, had instilled Laura with rational sophistication, who had suggested Darnby's calling, who had offered a premonition of Darnby's infidelity with Mrs. Whitehead—the subtle poison of infidelity which had destroyed her affection for him in a day —who had prepared her for his neglect and future brutality, had rendered his long absences a relief that, notwithstanding in these absences Ross' attention to her had been embarassingly importunate, had, above all, encouraged the determination to gain an independent livelihood.

She thought of all these things, and when her mind came down to the blow of that evening she resolved to be free at any sacrifice. Her intentions fully outlined and decided, she slept well into the morning.

She ordered breakfast to be served in her room, but cancelled the order when the bell boy brought a note from the night clerk. "He came down about an hour later last night and was told you had gone out

the side door. He took the seven o'clock train for the city,'' it read.

She met Mrs. Whitehead at the dining-room door. The woman remarked with unctuous malice: ''Your husband was looking for you from eight o'clock until midnight. Were you at the theatre?''

''Hereafter Darnby will look for you and such as you. And if you address another word to me I'll expose you to Mr. Whitehead,'' she retorted.

Half an hour later Laura had flung her effects into a trunk and was instructing the expressman to ''Take it to your main office and leave it there subject to further orders.''

Ross' inquisitiveness was appeased with ''I'm going home for awhile. Mr. Darnby will stay here.'' She was in a highly nervous but resolute tension—an urging force in the rapid consummation of her plan. Protony was more surprised at her early appearance than by her set countenance.

''Why, this is quite unusual—''

''Yes, and I have something unsual to propose. My husband returned last night. I cannot—I will not—live with him. I'll do anything—anything—but go back there. Give me something to do.''

CHAPTER III.

A DEBUT AND A REVELATION.

Laura's advent developed a design which Protony had had in mind for a long time—a purpose that his procrastinating nature had deferred whenever a positive step was to be taken. It had been his wish to be independent of the Illinois Conservatory. He imagined that the director was jealous of him, was trying to circumvent him, because Koening contended the pupils should appear on the Conservatory's stage when public performances were given and not at the theatres. So when Laura asked for employment he decided to put his oft-postponed plan into execution. As a preliminary, he sent her with a letter of introduction to the agent of the Beaurivage, a huge, pretentious apartment dwelling on the boulevard, where one lived en garçon en fille or en famille. He lodged there and Laura selected a lake front room on the floor below that of Protony. The next day he rented a small suite in the High Arts Building. His arrangements completed, he sent Koening a curt note of resignation—renouncing his position without a moment's warning. Then he appointed Laura secretary of the Protony School of Acting.

A swarm of circulars and some attractive advertising in the newspapers—supplemented by complimentary paragraphs among the dramatic notes—made several defections from the Illinois Conservatory and brought a few recruits from the outside—a typewriter (a spurious blonde of uncertain age), a grocer's clerk, a grammar school graduate and a superb creature with red hair and yellow eyes. The latter Protony dismissed within a week.

"I've discovered that she's a pugilist's mistress," he explained. "I don't mind that part of it, of course. But she might come here some day with a bruised cheek or a swollen eye, and so scandalize the place."

But the classes at the opening were numerous enough to give Protony a fair income after defraying the limited items of expenditure, of which the largest was the rent and the smallest Laura's salary. The change in position was advantageous to Laura's tuition. Protony gave her private instructions every day, following the regular hours.

The rehearsal of "Household Spirits" were continued—the pupils taking part in the comedietta had come over from the older institution. The performance was announced for a Monday afternoon, a fortnight after the Protony School of Acting had been in being. The while, Laura and Protony dined together every day at a French restaurant where the cooking was thorough and the fixed price as modest as the menu.

The intimacy enhanced his affection for her, but respect was not superseded by familiarity, as often happens in such relations with young people lacking innate refinement. He was ever the gentleman—one who appreciated that the woman whom he loved appreciated him for his gentle and cultured qualities. Both recognized that marriage was impossible—but the recognition proceeded from different premises. To her, of course, Darnby was the sole obstacle. To him Darnby was not so much in mind as his plans and ambitions—things that made him necessarily selfish. Additionally, he had always been extremely doubtful of matrimony as an efficacy of permanent happiness; rather, he held, with the major part of his profession, that marriage was a guarantee of speedy infelicity—and the many and varied experiences of the people of the theatre largely contributed to this conclusion. Further, he with the more part of his class, believed that their so-called liberalism (really nothing more than a badly digested idea of Bohemianism, a superficial misinterpretation of Schopenhauerian philosophy) was incompatible with the old-fashioned institution of marriage.

True, they had nothing to offer as a substitute, but that did not matter—to them. They simply trampled on the old scheme that made for homes and families, and allowed society to take care of itself as best it could.

Laura, however, thought only of the barrier caused by Darnby, but said nothing, hoping for a suggestion, an initiative from Protony, who seemed completely content socially. Aside from that, his thoughts were with his work, with which he made Laura thoroughly familiar. One day he told her he believed Koening and McDougal, the critic for *The Daily Spirit*, were leagued against him. Koening had offered McDougal an interest in the theatre which the German proposed to build, and the bait caught. The suspicion was confirmed by McDougal's criticism of the performance of the "Household Spirits" and "The Dawn." The review of the latter composition, Protony admitted, was in a degree basic, for in putting the piece in scene there had only been a fortnight's preparation of five new scholars. But the harsh lines written of "Household Spirits" were voted an outrage by everybody around the conservatory, a judgment in a way sustained when the rescensions of the other critics were drawn in comparison. *The Interior*, in long, involved sentences, praised the developing talents of the students in a paternal mode and suggested emendations in the dialogue of "Household Spirits." In conclusion there was a commendatory line for Laura. *The Forum's* brief critique began with Laura Darnby (Protony thought "Darnby" looked better on the programme than her maiden name, "Ruhland," so the name was retained.) It lauded her in a wealth of glowing adjectives. "The empyreal youth," "the sumptuous beauty," "the cheerful self-possession of the highly-promising amateur." A kind word was written of Ringold's play and the pupils were told they had the "adorable freshness of adolescence," "the fragrance and florescence of enviable youth." *The Daily Spirit* dismissed the "crude affair" in a disdainful paragraph.

Laura felt grateful to *The Forum*. She wished to

meet the critic, Mr. Phelon. She thought that his "cheerful self-possession" described her state of mind precisely, for after the initial plunge—after the first minutes—she was quite free from embarassment, presenting a comforting contrast to her associates, who, consumed with a yearning to distinguish themselves, were conscious, and, in consequence, stilted; quite free, because she had begun taking the business of acting as a means to an end, as a profession in which one became proficient as in other professions—by study, diligence, practice. When the curtain had fallen on "Household Spirits" Protony had said: "Admirable, my dear, admirable. I wish you would finish in the dressing room as soon as possible and go to the front. I should like to have you tell me how 'The Dawn' looks to you and how the audience takes it. I've an engagement following the performance so I'll not be able to see you until breakfast."

Not until the men in the boxes, who Laura knew were journalists, had singled her from the audience with pleased glances, was she aware that her presence was distinguished. Equally gratifying were the congratulations of Miss Rosenau and Miss Carr, who at the fall of the final curtain, met her in the foyer.

"I was never so surprised in my life as when I saw your name in the announcement which *The Forum* published yesterday," ejaculated the Jewess. "I had no idea you were inclined to the stage. You did wonderfully well. You went through your part with the ease of an experienced actress."

Miss Carr made a transition with "Are you keeping house? Where do you live?"

Laura was puzzled. "Keeping house? Why, no. Isn't Darnby—Mr. Darnby—at the hotel?"

They, in turn were puzzled. No, Mr. Darnby had not been seen there for weeks. The guests supposed the Darnbys had set up housekeeping or had gone to another hotel.

With keen curiosity—but with no feeling in the matter—Laura speculated on Darnby's whereabouts. She

spoke of him to Protony the next morning, who she noticed, was pale and concerned.

"He is also on my mind," Protony answered. "The engagement which I had yesterday was with Darnby. I thought it best not to tell you anything until I had heard what he had to say. I met him at the Palmer House and the first question he asked me was whether I thought you had talent. Not suspecting his motive, I said you were gifted and that you had a brilliant future. He then wanted to know if you were behind in the payment of your tuition. I told him that you were employed by me and that you paid for your lessons from the salary you received. He said that it was not necessary for you to be employed, that he would meet all your obligations."

Laura did not understand. She asked:

"Why, what does he mean?"

In a tone that was unwontedly low and with lips that betrayed tremulousness Protony replied:

"I'm afraid he will want to participate in the results of your probable success on the stage. And he —he may want you to live with him." His look was stressed with supplicative anxiety.

Her swift answer acted like a powerful tonic:

"Never! No, never! I shall not live with him an instant. The very thought of going back to him sickens me."

"There's a way of—of—of avoiding him forever."

She caught the suggestion.

"You mean a—"

"A div—a separation." He modified the idea midway in speech. His delicacy prompted the substitution of a word less harsh to her sensibility than the one that first came to his lips.

In a vague way—objective rather than subjective—it had come to her before. Yet now that a decision was fronted she was riven by its importance. Protony, keenly appreciative of her hesitative perturbation, approached the initial phases of the question tactfully, gently. Well into the matter, he became more pronounced, an accentuation actuated by the vital in-

terest he had in the subject. Exhausting the moral aspect of his counsel (he had quoted Tolstoi's dictum, which holds that once love ceases, further relations between man and wife are immoral) he expatiated on the material phase of it. He insisted that of all the impedimenta to a successful stage career, for a young woman to have a coarse, debauched husband was the most fatal.

"But the scandal of—of a divorce, Clarence!"

There need be no scandal, he assured. A decree could be quietly obtained. Here in the city divorces were granted every day without provoking a line of publicity. He would make a certainty doubly sure by seeing his friends, the editors of the daily papers, who surely would favor him by ignoring the case. She consented to institute proceedings, and he made a tour of newspaper offices the next day. With the single and signal exception of *The Diary*, the managing editor promised to pass the case. Godfrey Rowland of *The Diary*—an evasive personality, with a countenance of complete lubricity and vulpine duplicity—said he would be "governed by circumstances." Protony expected some difficulty here, for Rowland's prosperity was contingent upon the exploitation or the suppression of social irregularities and infelicities. Ethically and politically *The Diary's* standing and power was that of a blackmailer. But Protony said nothing to Laura about the possibility of an attack in what he considered an ineligible quarter, trusting to her ignorance of the vicious sheet. He was sure nothing of a notorious nature would follow out of her petition to the judge, a kindly jurist, with white immense hair and a patriarchal beard, who might well have been an elder brother of her attorney, so alike were they in appearance.

Darnby had been served with a notice from the court, which was supplemented by a note from Laura's counsel, who warned Darnby that if he opposed a separation he would be put in Professor Whitehead's danger; the ground for divorce would be changed to adultery, and Mrs. Whitehead named as co-respondent.

The reason given was cruelty. The night clerk of the Lake Side Hotel was the only witness. He testified Mrs. Darnby had come to him past midnight in great confusion and obvious agitation and that he had noted her bruised neck which appeared to have been caused by a blow. The judge deemed the evidence sufficient.

With a fervor that nothing less than a powerful climax at the theatre could have elicited, Protony congratulated Laura, who felt an ineffable relief when she understood she was free of Darnby. But her profound contentment was alloyed in the evening, when an American District Telegraph messenger presented a large envelope in an inscription she at once recognized. The seal broken, *The Diary* came to view, with the leading news article on the front page conspicuously marked in lines of blue pencil. Headed with big type and sensationally worded followed a column of comment on her divorce. Of the hearing itself there was little—a bare mention that a decree had been granted. But the short and peppery paragraphs were stuffed with scandalous inuendoes of Mrs. Darnby's life at the Lake Side Hotel; an intimation of the relations between "the experienced pupil and the experienced tutor at Protony's School of Dramatic Art." Not a word against Darnby, so it was palpable that he had furnished the material for the article. She read it with riveted eyes, with emotions entirely suspended. But when the paper dropped from her hands, a sickening sensation assailed her. Shame, helpless, ungovernable, unconcealable shame, followed; a feeling as if she had been apprehended, in the face of a staring crowd, in a nameless crime. She wished to hide somewhere, anywhere, but away from here. She pulled the curtains down, lowered the lights —and finally found relief in tears. She wept like a child, copiously, shamefacedly.

Had not her eyes been dried before she saw Protony his appearance had changed her emotions. He came down with *The Diary* in his hand, his face decomposed and a dead yellow. In a voice she did not recognize he asked her if she had read "this." Laura, now fairly self-controlled, feigned to make light of it, though con-

soled in supposing that Protony should take anything so much to heart in which she was concerned. She put her hand on his shoulder and gently adjured him not to mind—she assured him that she was not affected by Darnby's miserable revenge.

"But, my God, what about me? It will kill the reputation I've worked for so hard; it may block all my plans!"

This rift into his character—the glimpse of its fundamental selfishness—shocked her more than Darnby's blow.

The day he suggested that she get a divorce her pride was touched because he, at the same time, had omitted the implied complement of a hint of an ultimate union between themselves. Subsequently she consoled herself with the thought that he had refrained from the suggestion that she might not impugn his motives in counseling a separation from Darnby. She had decided to hold him guiltless of crass egoism until a divorce had been pronounced. And the very day she had expected him to prove that his moral delicacy was not surpassed by his aesthetic refinement he shouted: "But, my God, what about me?"

Not a word was said for some seconds. Protony, entirely self-centered, had fallen into a chair, without having removed his hat—his face toward the floor, expressing a morose and discouraged condition of mind.

She could not entirely conceal a note of contempt when she said: "Don't take it so seriously; you've not been hurt. *The Diary* cannot hurt anybody. The character of the paper is known." And she added with a subtle malice:

"If your plan for a stock company is feasible, you'll have no trouble in carrying it through."

The shade of doubt which she insinuated struck home. In an instant *The Diary* had passed out his mind and he was vociferous in demonstrating that the success of his scheme would admit of no doubt. He had altered his plans. He would not call it the Chicago Theatre. The name would be the Theatre of Art and Letters. He proposed an ancillary attraction; a memo-

rial room, containing as many souvenirs of famous dramatists—from Shakespeare to Pinero—as were to be had. This feature, he was sure, would appeal to capitalists.

She interrupted inconsiderately with the challenging question: "You've been talking of this from the day I first met you. Why don't you consummate your plan?"

Laura was in no mood to spare him and she followed with a wounding allusion to the deficiency of men who plan only to postpone. And her resentment of his unguarded display of selfishness was the spur that forced him to action. That night he wrote a prospectus. The following day he solicited a written endorsement of his project from Phelon and Burrows, who approved it warmly. With these letters he began a round of likely subscribers—bankers, brokers, financiers and men of wealth who were not financiers. His initial call was on the very rich Jonathan Hatch, Junior, known as the son of an eccentric cornerer of cereal, and as a collector of pictorial masterpieces assumed to be genuine. Mr. Hatch confessed he knew nothing of theatres; neither he nor his family ever attended the play. But if Protony believed a stock company would advance art in Chicago; if Protony was quite sure the scheme were profitable, he would take the matter under consideration and, the while, give a letter of introduction to Charles Wellsworth, president of the Park Exchange National Bank, whose cult was sculpture and who, besides, interested himself in the drama and such things. Protony sat half an hour in the waiting room contiguous to the president's office. When at last he was admitted, Mr. Wellsworth grasped his hand nervously with the right and took Hatch's note with the left. In reading the few lines—the essence of which was Mr. Protony wants to build a theatre—Mr. Wellsworth's grip relaxed, his nervous exuberance suddenly subsided. Personally he could do nothing just then. His own money was invested in real estate. The bank, of course, could put no funds in anything without ample security. No doubt Brander Jones of the Eastern Trust Company would head the

subscription list with a handsome sum. With a few strokes of the pen Mr. Wellsworth told Mr. Jones that Mr. Protony was a worthy young man whose purpose would elevate the community. Protony gained access to Jones immediately. He was not invited to take a chair; such an invitation was obviously reserved for those who were known. Directly Mr. Jones scented the profitlessness of the proposal he got up—a sign that Protony's audience soon would end. He made a final test of a possible thrift in the thing for his institution: "Have you any subscribers? Who is your banker?" The negative answer sent him to the door. He turned the knob himself to hasten Protony's departure. "I regret I can do nothing for you, sir."

Protony, easily elated and as easily dejected, was not only discouraged but humiliated by this last experience. He felt as an importunate beggar must feel —if there be sensitive mendicants—who ask for alms inopportunely. Utterly put down he wandered toward his office. On the way he heard: "Have you tried it on, dear boy?" It was the voice of Phelon, soft and agreeably modulated with its scholarly enunciation. In appearance the two men were alike. Temperamentally they were antepodal. Phelon's eyes told of indolence, nonchalance, facile talent, careless independence. Protony's long face shortened at sight of the journalist, whose reputation had just been spread across seas by Henry Irving, who, at a London banquet, between several glasses of champagne, had declared Phelon to be one of the best dramatic critics in the language; and the eulogy, disseminated by Reuter's agency throughout Europe, was cabled over to the Associated Press. In the cat's hump attitude which he involuntarily struck in the presence of the widely-read reviewer Protony acknowledged differentially:

"I'm afraid I am scoring another failure, Mr. Phelon."

"Don't say that, dear boy. Call it successful experience. Besides, you haven't made any preliminary exploitation. You should 'work the press,' as the advance agent says. Let me have the plans and a sketch of

that fine theatre you are going to give us. I'll have a nice notice in *The Forum* tomorrow."

"Why, yes, he's right," counseled Laura, when Protony told her what he had done. "I wonder you had not thought of that. You must give the thing wide publicity." She added maliciously, "And that will counteract the effect of *The Diary*, you know.

He took the thrust without thinking of a retort, being buoyed to good humor by the expectation of what Phelon would do for him.

Phelon endorsed the enterprise unqualifiedly. Inclusive of a cut of the theatre *The Forum* published two columns urging wealthy citizens to subscibe to the playhouse. The stock company were an antidote to the one-star and combination system which was degrading dramatic art everywhere outside of New York. New York had several indigenious organizations of a highly artistic order while Chicago must depend on strolling companies for her theatrical performances. Mr. Protony had shown by his work at the Conservatory that he had the qualifications necessary to the management of a permanent association of actors; it would be a stimulant to the American dramatist who received but little encouragement in New York, where plays by foreign writers only were produced. Chicago had the best orchestra in the country in Theodore Thomas' musicians; Mr. Thomas' presence had been an educational force in music. A stock company would do the same for the drama.

The article lifted Protony to confident enthusiasm. He was positive the subscription list must be filled that day. He set out full of confidence. Presently his glow lowered at the sight of Burrows of *The Interior*. Protony greeted him with the deferential urbanity he always assumed in the company of journalists other than Phelon, with whom the deference was emphasized and the urbanity diminished to imperceptibility. The tall, imposing critic jerked his head forward less than half an inch, looked savage and passed on. Protony, all alarmed, turned back and in an appealing register, called: "Mr. Burrows! Mr. Burrows!"

Burrows turned suddenly with: "Well?"

"I—I—greeted you and I was afraid you didn't see me."

"Well?"

Protony was now sure that Burrows' slight had been intentional. Feverish to know the reason he made an opening:

"Did you see *The Forum* this morning, Mr. Burrows?"

He unwittingly came to the source: "Protony, why in hell did you give that story only to *The Forum?*"

Not until then did Protony realize what he had done—furnished *The Forum* with a scoop on its rivals. The realization of the enormity of his tactlessness dazed him.

"Mr. Burrows I—I—I—couldn't get the money for my scheme. I—I was discouraged and happened to meet Mr. Phelon—I mean Phelon—who suggested what you saw in the paper. He believed such a notice would put the scheme through."

The change from "Mr. Phelon" to "I mean Phelon," a fugitive trifle and quite involuntary, was indicative of a shifty trait which was not lost on Burrows.

"He said it would put the thing through, did he? Well, we'll see." with this he turned and walked away.

Protony's fetish was the press. He felt superlative joy in its praise; an unnamable terror in its criticism. The possibility of having incurred the enmity of *The Interior* through lack of tact filled him with a sickening terror. For an hour he paced Michigan Avenue trying to devise a conciliatory plan. Twice he entered a saloon for whisky. The brutal stimulant imparted transient courage and quickened his imagination. Finally, he thought he had hit upon a solution. He would appease Burrows by giving *The Interior* a scoop on the list of subscribers, the roster of players engaged, the name of the first play to be produced. He had chosen the actors some time ago and Sardou's "Diplomacy" was to be the opening drama. All was arranged except the subscriptions. With these he must

begin at once. He took another drink of the violent liquor and then turned toward La Salle street.

The opening solicitation was the private banking house of Slamsey and Company. The senior member greeted him with Southern geniality. He listened with approving nods and propitious interjections; read the letters and examined the plan attentively. Protony watched the broker's immobile countenance in hopeful expectancy which ended in the certainty that Mr. Slamsey would write down for a large amount. He presented the scroll destitute of names: "Now, Mr. Slamsey, may I ask you to start this with a round sum?"

The banker encircled Protony's arm with his hand confidentially: "Yes, I shall be glad to do so—but not just at present. We are not quite ready for such an enterprise. In a few years—say four or five. Stick to your Conservatory a little longer, my man, and then come back to us. We'll start you handsomely—in time. Do you smoke? Take one—they are really good."

The refusal was the more telling because of its bland vivacity. Protony found himself on the curbstone in that state of nervous frenzy which drives balked women to a hysterical persistence. In something like delirious desperation he made the rounds of a dozen financial institutions. In the first of these he got a hideous shock from the question of the President: "Who is Phelon?" Why, was it possible not to know Phelon —Phelon the great dramatic critic? At two offices he was refused access to the Presidents; they were too busy to see him. Here he was cut short in the midst of his exposition; there he was answered: "No", directly he exposed his plan. Four more bankers had never heard of Phelon, had not read *The Forum* article, but promised to get a copy of the paper and study the proposition at their leisure. Three financiers were deacons who could not conscientiously entertain a proposal to aid in the building of a theatre. At the last, he was irrevocably demoralized by the head of the Occidental Security Company, who said that all theatrical men were swindlers.

CHAPTER IV.

A SAMARITAN INTRUDER.

"Are you ill, Clarence?"

Laura asked the question, prompted by Protony's white, drawn, defeated face. He threw the prospectus on the table and fell in a chair.

"Ill? No; worse; I'm killed. I couldn't raise a dollar. Where I wasn't snubbed I was insulted. In some places I was treated like a burglar."

To him it was impossible that he should have met with such treatment. With his supersensitive temperament, ungovernable imagination and complete ignorance of practical affairs it was inevitable that he should arrive at an absurd conclusion; there was a conspiracy with Burrows behind it. His fixed idea could not be dislodged by the gross discrepancy—to which his attention was called by Laura—that *The Forum* article was of that day, so that Burrows could not have had time to effect an opposition, especially among financial men. That didn't matter, Protony insisted—Burrows must have heard of Phelon's intention. Had he not threatened that the scheme would end disastrously? If no hint had been passed around La Salle Street was it possible that all should have withheld their signatures. There was a conspiracy. He held to his theory with the tenacity of the weak—and a few days later changed mind with the suddenness of the imaginative. No, it wasn't Burrows after all. He met the critic by an appointment of Burrows' making. *The Interior* man had apologized for the way he had greeted Protony the other day. His rudeness had proceeded from the chagrin felt at being scooped by the *The Forum.* That over, he wished to re-establish their

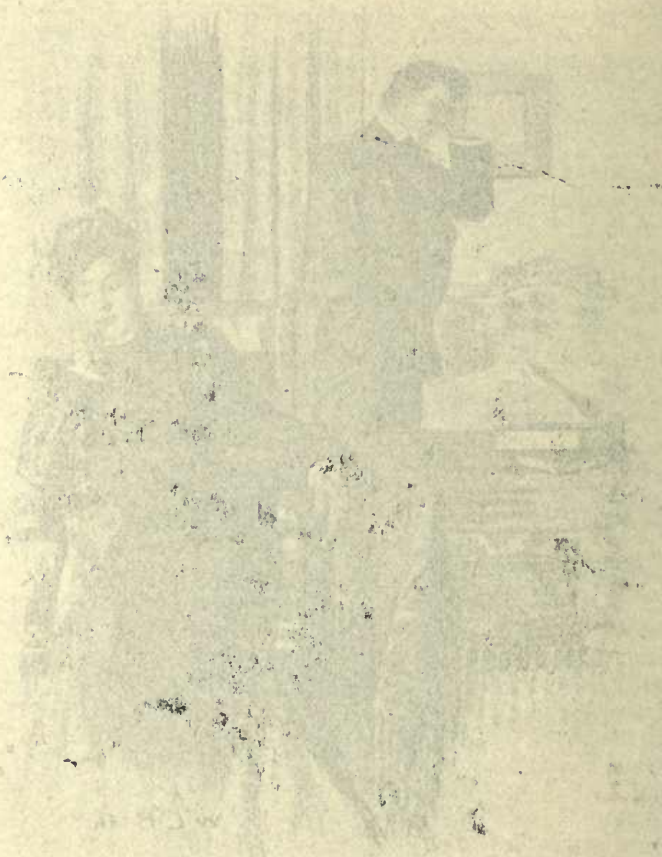
cordial relations. And as an earnest of his good will he would submit a play upon which he had been occupied for six months. He would send it to Protony directly the stock company was formed.

"I hadn't the heart to tell him how unsuccessful I was in getting subscriptions," Protony acknowledged timidly. Then hopefully, "I may find a way of putting the thing through after all."

The hope evaporated in the failure to discover a means of breaking the blockade of La Salle Street's unanimous rejection of the theatre; so that if it was not a conspiracy fostered by Burrows, it must be the effect of the article in *The Diary*. Laura combated this deduction futilely, for it became invincible with Protony. The connection with that divorce had hurt his reputation irremediably. Ignorant as a toad of the prime principles which governs business, it did not occur to him that he had been turned away because bankers could see no profit in his proposition. With his misdirected vision on a very distant object he did not see that his standing had been impaired in an intimate quarter by *The Diary's* revelations until half his pupils were gone. Two girls, sisters, whose father had become rapidly and prodigiously rich and who were burning to have grace of body and speech, were the first to go—their health compelled them to suspend their studies for a while. This defection soon influenced other female scholars. Laura perceived the secessions and apprehended their cause, but said nothing. She hoped the old pupils would be replaced by new. A realization of the situation came to Protony with a rushing force one morning when Laura was compelled to call his attention to a heap of unpaid bills. The rent, gas and miscellaneous charges were overdue and there were no funds with which to meet them. The money paid for tuition had been given to Protony as usual, and he, as usual, had spent the customary amount. Awakened from his dreams and schemes he saw what had happened and at the discovery his selfishness leaped to the surface.

His first impulse was self-protection. Without

"—— One of those unconscious flashes that disclose the lowest layer of a man's character."—Page 37.



thought, involuntarily, he exclaimed: "Say, we'll have to separate. At this rate we'll both starve." It was one of those unconscious flashes that discloses the lowest layer of a man's character. He had again betrayed his egoism to Laura, who once more registered it against him. When his fear had subsided, when his mind became pacific, he asked to be forgiven. She quite calmly told him: "You are weak and selfish, Clarence."

The frank description humbled him for several days. He was willing to make any sacrifice for her. Instead of dining at the French café he proposed a less expensive restaurant and if business did not mend they could give up their chambers at the Beaurivage and engage rooms on the North or West side, where rent was cheaper and the accommodations not bad. They made the change in a fortnight, and six weeks later the agent of the High Arts Building warned Protony that the School of Acting was two months in arrears. A smaller and less expensive suite was taken in Clark street. Laura accepted the moves without complaint, but Protony became irritable. His pride was wounded, a wound which his acquaintances kept sensitized by insinuating questions, by looks of wondering pity. From a commercial point of view Clark street—the thoroughfare of the penny gaff, of the cheap and of the distressed actor—proved dear. Protony lost his best male students. Now and again a rowdy (and generally improvident) youth was enrolled, but he would not remain beyond the period prescribed by his initial payment. Protony, in Laura's presence, restrained himself with discernible effort. When alone he was morose and his moroseness had the sinking element of remorsefulness—regret, after all, that he had met Laura. For weeks she had been on trial before him, for having caused his professional humiliation. And he convicted her—she was the impediment to his success. He said nothing to her of his sentence; but his long silences at table, his preoccupied air when they were in the street together, his evasive manner at home and at the Conservatory warned her that he

was bitterly distrustful. She said nothing, thinking that he was in the throes of despondency from which he would emerge stronger, more hopeful, more energetic.

But he suggested his position pointedly one day. "I read Schopenhauer's 'Metaphysics of Love' last night. You should read it. It's a wonderful study of a vital thing. What appeals to me especially is, the German insists that the constant association with an attractive woman clouds a man's intellect; that she is very dangerous to a man of intellectual pursuits."

She retorted "I did not know that I was attractive or that you were intellectual."

She left abruptly and repaired to her room determined to break with him. The direct affront had wrought her to such a pitch of indignation that she made ready to leave at the first opportunity. She wrote to a widely-known New York dramatic agency an application for an engagement and looked up the address of several local agents, in readiness to call on them. The next day she went to a huge building in Dearborn street, was hoisted to the fourteenth floor and entered a large room filled with tobacco smoke and a band of smooth-shaven, blue chinned men with long unkempt hair. One with the bluest chin, the longest hair and the blackest pipe listened to her without removing the pipe from his mouth.

What a pity! She had just missed it! Only an hour ago the agent had sent a juvenile lead to Louis James. There was nothing more at present, but he would take her address. She gave her name and then hesitated. He had written the "y" of Darnby and was waiting pen on paper. For a second she was in a cloud of confusion. Where? Not with Protony! The agent turned inquiringly. She answered desperately: "Lake Side Hotel." Very good. He probably would have something within a week or two.

Why had she given the Lake Side Hotel as her address? Was it desperation or inspiration? She hardly knew. She had lived there, certainly; and Ross' offer of assistance—made what now seemed long ago—

darted to mind at the critical moment, though he had not been considered before. Many friends in Missouri were mentally rejected as likely lenders of a sum sufficient to meet her wants until she should have found employment. But Ross, of whom she might be sure, had not occurred to her until the eleventh minute. It was certain that he would help her, but—she saw a public telephone as the elevator stopped at the ground floor. Impulsively she entered the double panelled box, lifted the transmitter and ordered: "Oakland 7778." At central's request she feverishly slid the nickel in the slot and hearing "Hello", audaciously called for Mr. Ross.

"What is it?" She recognized his voice.

"Mr. Ross, this is Laura Ruhland."

"Who?"

"Laura—Mrs. Darnby."

"Yes, oh, yes; how do you do, Mrs. Darnby?"

"Well, thank you. I expect to move in a day or two and meanwhile I took the liberty of giving the Lake Side as my address. Please hold any letters you may receive."

"Where are you going?"

"I—I—don't know just yet."

"Mrs. Darnby, I wish you would come down on the next train. I've something of importance to tell you." He spoke eagerly.

In thirty minutes Laura met Ross at the entrance to the hotel. He was waiting for her and extended his hands in ardent welcome. The clerk bowed politely, the telegraph operator smiled amiably; but the women in the foyer—it was too early for the men to be there—were variously hostile. Some purposely evaded recognition; others saluted her distantly with an air of cold reproof; still others acknowledged her presence by broad stares of amazement. At these wounding greetings there shot through Laura a feeling of burning resentment. She went with Ross to a private parlor, ready to accede to anything he might suggest—anything, so that she could retaliate the insults of these creatures.

Ross escorted her to a richly upholstered chair near a window, facing south. Taking the seat she glanced out. The sun enveloped the gorgeous green lawn in a sumptuous glow. Beyond the verdant expanse, carriages flitted by, the wheels and horses' paraphernalia glistening like a mirror's flash; bicycles, their riders in high-hued costumes, darted past; on the veranda, within an arm's reach, a young couple, happy and handsome, probably newly married, promenaded. The brilliancy of the scene inspired her with a wish to remain there where she could see it always. As if in response to her unuttered desire Ross confessed: "I've been watching you for months. I know that your—your what's his name?—Oh, Protony, is hard up. I've been waiting for you to let me do something for you. Come back here. You need not trouble yourself about expenses. Pay your bills when you are able. I've had something more in mind. I'm thinking of organizing a theatrical company, made up of young, well-bred people, with you at the head. I've often backed such enterprises and know all about them. My idea is to play the Chicago circuit, that is, the towns around Chicago. Now what do you think?"

She frankly acknowledged that she was without money and thanked him for his invitation to stop at the hotel, at least until she found employment. She feared that she lacked the qualifications for leading a company, but would defer to his judgment.

It was settled then. She would remain. A quick whispered consultation with the clerk, and the bell boy accompanied her to a light, roomy chamber on the third floor. She felt a thrill of satisfaction in informing Protony that the bearer would pack her effects for conveyance to the Lake Side Hotel. The note given the porter, and her toilet made, she read until dinner time. All the men were glad to see her. They shook her hand with friendly warmth: Miss Carr and Miss Rosenau came to her table and most cordially welcomed her. Mrs. Whitehead bowed curtly, and Laura believed she saw the effects of a quarrel in the woman's eye, a similar sign being noticeable in Ross, who asked if he

could do anything more to facilitate her installation, a question that Mrs. Whitehead overheard and which deepened her look of displeasure. Laura divined an intrigue between the pair, a divination which was confirmed by Mrs. Whitehead's insultingly bitter manner toward her as Ross' attentions were massed upon his latest guest. But Laura decided to be true to herself, to hold her conscience and person inviolate. There had come to her from the depths of sub-consciousness the white, perennial truth that genuine strength of mind, of volition, of talent, proceed from purity; that between a virtuous genius and a vitiated, the former is the greater, the more permanent; that fortitude, health of body, serenity of thought are predicated, in women, on virtue.

The realization of this grand moral law had come suddenly and she wished to obey it; realizing, too, that the woman who obeys enhances her charm. She perceived that she had become for Ross an attraction not altogether sensuous; an irresistible quality which Protony had felt but which was interpreted differently by the two men so opposite in character and temperament. Protony felt its mental properties, Ross its physical influence. Both would have her as companion; both were too selfish for matrimony.

CHAPTER V.

AN ENGAGEMENT.

During the first fortnight Ross was discreetly assiduous in his attentions, but Laura tactfully held him distant. Besides, she was applying an idea that had occurred to her the day of her return to the hotel. She got a public library card—Ross was the guarantor—and was making a study of the literature of the theatre. She read much, memorized strong roles, declaimed in private.

In the third week Protony sent a letter. He asked permission to call. She made no answer. Then came a note from the dramatic agency in Dearborn street. An engagement with a burlesque company, "The Pink Owls." The offer was submitted to Ross, who earnestly advised her not to accept it. "With your attractive personality you would be a fine card and they would pay you a good salary, but once identified with that kind of a show you are lost to better companies. Managers of the legitimate would not want you. It's rare that a woman works up from a provincial burlesque company; she frequently descends to one. Don't take it, no matter what they offer to pay you."

He simply affirmed what she had surmised and declined the engagement in an appreciative note of thanks. She also was thankful to Ross, who, however, was constantly vitiating her gratitude. Careful and never compromising in the presence of others his attitude was embarrassing whenever she found herself alone with him. Once when he followed her to the park she was compelled to repel him pointedly. As a rule, though, she parried his importunities deftly. Now she feigned not to understand; again she laughed good-

naturedly and fled inoffensively. One day he extended an invitation to attend the theatre. This she accepted, feeling sure of herself and knowing that it was not unusual with him to invite the women of the hotel to the play.

Among the theatrical people in the lobby, grouped on the side opposite the box office, sufficiently conspicuous to be conveniently observed by the incoming audience, was Protony, drawn-faced and wan-eyed. The sight of Laura stirred him almost to dispossession. He dropped his hat in agitation and followed her with looks of devouring attention. Coming out after the performance she saw him in the same place and apparently he was in the same state of mental disquietude. Laura designedly took no notice of him; and Ross had not seen him. She guessed that he would follow them and was confirmed in her conjecture when in entering the vaulted railway station she turned. He stood in front of the hotel that faced the station entrance. She confessed to herself her satisfaction. It was the gratification perennial in woman when she is made aware that man is thrall to her. Laura understood his condition; although he could not live with her or without her, he was more wretched without her than he had been with her, his consuming ambition and thorough selfishness notwithstanding. It was obvious that her beauty, heightened by an assumed hauteur, had quickly generated in him passion and jealousy.

She expected the card he sent up next day. Word was sent down that Miss Ruhland would see him presently, in the blue parlor. She looked at the clock, took up a book and read twenty-five minutes. Then she descended to the first floor, but before going to the appointed room she stopped leisurely to exchange commonplaces with several of the guests. He was seated in an humble attitude, hat in hand, head and back bent. He shot up instantly she entered.

Laura, completely self-possessed, and in a perfectly unconcerned manner, allowed him to take her hand, which he held sheerly absorbed.

"Well?"

The curt and cool interrogation straightened him. A little nettled, he asked her to be seated. He had a business proposition to offer—the word business was stressed. Catherine Fix, daughter of Mrs. Fix, the society leader, and Craig Fix, the rich soap manufacturer, had written a play which had been sent to him for revision. The father would pay Protony handsomely for the work of putting the piece in scene. The drama as given to him was impossible. The theme was not unoriginal and there were two viable characters, but the thing needed reconstruction. Therefore he would appear as collaborator. Cooley's Theatre had been engaged for a fortnight, where the production would take place. He already had outlined the characters and was to engage the cast. He offered her a leading role. She had listened with increasing interest. The climax—his offer of an important part—was an unexpected proposal. She remained perfectly self-contained, however, in no movement or expression betraying her gratification. She thanked him formally, but as she was considering an engagement offered a week ago she couldn't commit herself at once. She hoped an immediate acceptance or rejection was not imperative?

No, there was no hurry. It would be at least a fortnight before the play could be made ready for distribution among the cast.

Very good, then, she would give a definite answer in time to meet necessary arrangements. She arose, thus suggesting that the meeting was at an end. Not a note of familiarity, not a word implying the slightest intimacy had been touched in a conversation which had the mannered tone of a business conference. While she had held herself fully possessed, his composure had been imperfect. His feelings had been revealed, now by a tremolo accent, again by a restive movement of the eyes with a nervous flutter of their lashes. At the parlor door, as they were separating, Ross came up, bowed shortly to Protony, greeted Laura with a lightened expression in which there was an overt suggestion of admiration, and engaged her in a low-toned talk,

the while walking toward the lift, his head bent confidentially. Both Laura and Protony turned; he, just before going out of the main entrance; she, when about to step into the lift. Both had abandoned their affectation of reserve. He read retaliative satisfaction in her face; she, jealousy and dejection in his. She pitied him—the pity one feels for a child that is in pain. And, after all, she would have been content to be with him, for he was an agreeable, instructive and intellectual companion, who might have given her and himself a further reach in the affairs of the world. But his abnormal selfishness—a vice which she now abhorred—repelled her. Nevertheless, it was gratifying to see that her charm was more potent than his egoism, so she was not displeased when the bell boy again brought his card the next morning. The first glance told her that he had spent a wretched night; his cheeks were hectic; his breath of a feverish temperature.

He did not respond to her "Good morning," and they silently took seats that looked upon the picturesque drive. He broke silence with: "I congratulate you on having found a friend with plenty of money."

The remark, though she knew it was impelled by bitter jealousy, hurt her.

She replied resentfully: "Thank you. You are very kind. The friend you refer to is one who does not believe that the world was made for him alone. He is not so self-centered as to be unmindful of everything and everybody but himself. He is not likely to turn me out of doors because something goes wrong with him. He is a man and not an unreliable weakling."

The last sentence told—the truth of it made it telling. From offensive he became defensive; his pupils had left him; he had been haunted by creditors; had been turned away from every door in La Salle Street; had seen the possibility of success disappear for ever. He had been despondent, utterly discouraged. He stopped—

Laura rounded her retort with: "Yes, as I say, you thought only of yourself."

Admitted. But wasn't his selfishness extenuated

by the distressing circumstances? Come, let her be considerate—he uttered the word in a supplicative key—and he would show that his ambition was subordinate to his love for her. A rush of misfortune had upset him temporarily. Never again would he allow himself to be carried away by the stress of adversity. Now he was sure of success. The play upon which he was working must succeed and it was virtually his own. True, Miss Fix had furnished him with a theme, but he had made the play. Fix's dialogues had been entirely rewritten; all but two characters had been extinguished. The cast had been selected. Besides Laura, two of his best students would be in the production. For the rest, popular professionals were engaged.

Volatile, he jumped from a humble amatory mood to enthusiasm of the theatre. Laura was vexed and amused in turn. Her admiration for the refined artist was alloyed by her contempt for the man. At parting he relapsed to an imploring attitude. She treated him then as a teacher a repentant lad. He came again at the end of the week to announce that the play would be read to the cast the following Friday, at ten o'clock in the morning. At that hour Laura ascended a flight of stairs to the left of a pretty lobby, and opened a door labeled "Manager's Office." Protony and a semicircle of men and women were waiting. There were hurried introductions, of which Laura had no impression save the presentation to Miss Fix, a nervous, shriveled, spinster-like woman with a high thin voice.

Protony read the play to intermittent applause, always led by John Burton, especially engaged for the production at seven hundred dollars a week, it was whispered to Laura. The reading ended, Miss Fix and Protony were effusively congratulated. Laura's conception of the piece was nebulous. She had been unable to concentrate her thoughts. She had heard Protony's voice—that sensitive and cultured organ with its every shade of elocutionary appreciation, notwithstanding its veiled quality—but its meaning was lost to her. Amid the buzz and fragmentary talk which fol-

lowed the felicitations, Protony handed Laura her part. "You are to play the broker's daughter. The first rehearsal will be called a week from to-day. If agreeable I'll call to-morrow and go over the part with you."

She answered, "Yes", and thanked him. At the hotel she at once buried herself in the role. The character was conventional; all the parts were so in "The Millionaire" except the title role. This was an Irishman who had accumulated money and much political experience. Originally a humble laborer of very limited needs, well disposed, easily contented. Then, progressively, purse-proud, arrogant, aggressive, irreligious and disdainful of everything that lacked the mark of wealth. He was set in a feebly familiar fable; a daughter in love with a young man opposed by the father, who insists that the "garril" marry his business partner, a heavily-mustached, scrowling fellow, who utters the simplest word in deep, ominous tones. The "garril" refuses. The heavily-mustached gentleman concocts a scheme to ruin the father on the Board of Trade. The nice young man—hitherto devoid of astuteness—hears of the plan. Although he allowed it to be consummated he takes advantage of his knowledge to win exactly what the millionaire loses. The father, broken in spirit and in dollars, consents to the marriage at the final curtain. Protony's judgment had led him to develop the main character. In deft touches he had indicated the man's antecedents, the original warmth of heart, his native wit, the source of his wealth. And for spectacular effect he had decided to put the trader's hall of the Board of Trade, with its raging excitement, on the stage.

Laura saw that her role was about as subordinate to the millionaire as were the other characters; but she divined that the daughter could be made sympathetic, even winsome, by accentuating the conciliatory spirit which moved between father and lover, by drawing the better nature from her untutored parent. By modifying and transposing she drew a parallel; the quasi-savage father and the gentle daughter were the Ingomar and the Parthenia of the German play, "Der Sohn

der Wildniss''—she had a copy of Robert Ringold's translation. Protony admired the parallelism, which had not occurred to him, who was so bound up in the Irishman: ''I see you have read and studied to advantage,'' he remarked complacently.

''Thanks to you.''

The exchange of compliments gratified him, who was in the throes of jealousy and unrequited affection. They passed an unruffled afternoon. Laura was completely occupied with the play. Protony had wished that she had offered some token of a perfect and permanent reconciliation; still, for want of better, it pleased him intimately to see her so intelligently and appreciatively interested in a thing near and dear to him—she, his pupil.

From ten o'clock next morning there were two chaotic hours on the dim stage of Cooley's Theatre, caused by the first rehearsal of the first act of ''The Millionaire.'' None of the cast knew the lines save Laura, and she was imperfect. The act was walked through, the players repeating the dialogue from the typewritten copies in hand. It was merely a stage introduction of the characters when scenes and positions were outlined. In the afternoon at two o'clock the second act was taken up and the last act the following day. At the third probation the actors had memorized their speeches.

Two days before the date set for the production, Protony felt that he would be too nervous to manage the stage on the opening night; and as the time neared for the public test his burning desire for success, combined with absolute terror of failure, had intensified to such a degree that he feared he would not have control of himself or the company. The stage management devolved on John Burton, who had mastered the title part in a week.

A fortnight from the first rehearsal ''The Millionaire'' was ready for presentation.

CHAPTER VI.

A PLAY IS PRODUCED.

"Half hour! Half hour! Half hour! Half hour!" It was the shrill voice of the short and sharp call boy who uttered the cry as he rapped at the doors of the dressing rooms.

Either a "yes" or a "here" was the response to the knock. Every active participant was found to be in the theatre thirty minutes before the curtain.

A quarter of an hour later the lad made another round with calls of "Fifteen minutes!" "Fifteen minutes!" "Fifteen minutes!" "Fifteen minutes!"

When the orchestra was ready to intone the first note the boy passed the final warning: "Overture!" "Overture!" "Overture!" "Overture."

"All right," the lad reported to John Burton, who repeated "All right" through a tube placed among a cluster of gutta-percha buttons and iron knobs in the first wing to the right of the stage. Instantly a light and joy ous melody filled the theatre. Starting with a dash and proceeding with a lilt and swing, it soon subsided to an air of rare sweetness, then a merry key was again struck, a strain of lively badinage, of caressing activity. It was a captivating parody, yet beneath its seductive banter was a throb of pure emotion, of sincere reverence for the Greeks which swelled forth in the Elysian finale. The overture to Von Suppe's "Die Schoene Helene" ended. Burton stepped to the center of the stage and ordered: "Clear!" All but two actors disappeared. Burton, from a coulisse, touched a button. A red lamp, hung high, gleamed in front. The two players nervously assumed a stipulated pose. The curtain ascended.

In Miss Fix's box, back of her numerous friends and concealed from the audience, Protony sat. When he heard Burton's "Clear!" he looked at the auditors appealingly. The house was filled to the last seat in the second balcony. There were fifteen hundred heads ranged amphitheatrically and swaying indolently, as leaves in sunlight. Protony recognized many people, but they appeared to have changed. Their faces seemed to express disdain, mockery, severity, skepticism—all, to Protony's imagination, challenged and doubted success. A score of opera glasses were turned toward his box—and they looked like leveled pistols. Away in the rear he discovered the anxious faces of an old woman, a young woman and two young men; his mother, sister and brothers, relatives he had not seen for a long time, whom he scarce acknowledged, though they lived in the city far out among the humble and laborious Irish. A feeling at once of remorse and gratitude seized him at the sight. They were watchful of his career; proud of him in an awesome way, no doubt, and he had never given them a thought, so absorbed was he in himself—in ambition, in personal desire. But pitted against those four well-wishers how many were indifferent, even malevolent! The men directly in front—those whom he could see distinctly—looked as if they were burdened with mortgages—material and mental. They evidently had brought into the theatre their troubles—anxieties, distractions, pre-occupations, dislikes, contempts. Protony now realized very nearly what it meant to be a dramatist. He must dispel the prejudices, the worriments of these people; must remove from them the cerements of the carking cares of the outside world whence they came; must lift them out of themselves, in fine; must make them all of one mind which shall pronounce "The Millionaire" a success. Again he looked at the audience—that sea of eyes, how defiant! He had an impulse to postpone the production, to hold the curtain.

Too late! The final note in the orchestra had sounded. A bell rang. The curtain rose. There was profound silence for what seemed an aeon of time.

Then he heard a voice muffled and indistinct, lost, seemingly, in the immensity of the auditorium. An actor had uttered the first lines of the play Would that he could silence him! All the imperfections of the work surged to his mind. The doubts, the uncertainties of several situations, instantly hardened to convictions of absolute faults. He was sure the thing would end in failure. But what could he do? He felt imprisoned there, in the box.

An inspiration; he would put himself in the place of an average spectator, would judge the piece from a cold-blooded, impartial standpoint, as if he had nothing to do with the production; had not written or corrected a line, and not rehearsed a scene of the drama. For a bare moment he was oddly impressed; but only for a moment. He found it impossible to be objective. He could not listen. A thousand incoherent nothings flitted through his heated brain. Everything distracted him. The flutter of a handkerchief; the turn of a head; the wave of a fan; the frou-frou of a dress; a cough—these diverted his intention. Directly beneath there were whispers: "What did you get for your wheat?"

"Seventy-two, and then I sold fifty short at two and a quarter."

In the next box a young fellow murmured to his pretty companion: "Oh, it's stupid. Why don't they do something?"

An old man in the front row coughed and this became contagious. A score seemed to be simultaneously coughing so that the voices of the actors could not penetrate the noise. Now the dialogue did not carry across the footlights. The gallery grew restive. Some one on high shouted: "Oh, speak up! we can't hear you."

Protony felt himself giving away. His nervous tension was sinking to positive terror. He jumped from the chair, hurried along the mural aisle unobserved and bolted out of the lobby. The cool atmosphere brought him to a nearly normal realization of things. But he was mentally exhausted and after walking from La Salle street to Clark street and back again, he stepped into

a saloon, near the La Salle street corner, that had near the entrance a stone cutter's statute of Robert Burns. He fell into a chair at a miniature table, asked for whisky, drank the stimulating poison and picked up a newspaper. He read, but had no sense of what he was reading. With the journal close to his eyes his mind persisted in presenting the scene he had just left. Again he heard the price of wheat, the remarks of "Oh, it's stupid," the coughs, the ominous restiveness of the gallery; he saw the mechanical movements of the actors. Well, as he could not get away from the play he must go back and brave it out. Going up the lobby he was lifted to a new emotion, prompted by a blast of applause. He leaped to the entrance of the auditorium and saw the second act in progress—the Board of Trade scene. The stage was crowded with an excited mob which was giving a pulsating picture of a panicky wheat market, and the audience, recognizing the truth of the illustration, was wildly approving. The animated act held the house tense to the end.

The drop down, there was a roar in which "Author!" "Fix!" "Protony!" were salient. Miss Fix, agitated, looked to Protony, who, as white as she was red, beckoned with his finger. She followed him to the stage, where Burton drew the curtain at the left corner and motioned the spinster to step before the audience. With an awkward gait she shuffled toward the lights, in her confusion not seeing the hand which Protony, who was beside her, had the self-possession to offer. Protony bowed gracefully; Fix made an angular gesture with her head. The spectators were tumultuous. An urchin in Paradise demanded "Speech!" "Speech!" The cry was taken up insistently. Fix, altogether unstrung, looked helplessly at Protony. A week ago just such a contingency had occurred to the latter when an opposite line from "The Tempest" came to memory. He signaled silence with uplifted hand. The clamor subsided to the ripple of gloved applause, then ceased entirely. In a voice not free from tremulousness but distinct withal, he adapted Shakespeare's words:

"The only answer we can make is thanks and thanks and ever thanks."

He bowed, took Miss Fix's hand and slowly sidled from view. Directly they were out of sight the applause was renewed and Fix and Protony stopped; they supposed the audience wished for their reappearance. They turned to reappear when Burton held up his hand. "Stop!" "Wait!" "Wait!" Penetrating the patter of hands there was now the audible cry: "Burton!" "Darnby!" "Burton!" "Darnby!"

"Send for Miss Darnby, quick," Burton ordered. Laura came on, wondering what was wanted.

"They want us out there." Burton called one of his assistants, who held the curtain while Laura stepped forward in a hand clasp with the handsome actor. They made a concinnous pair; he tall, sinewy, symmetrical and manly; she, on a line with his shoulder, sinuous, graceful and womanly. The house shouted, and in the vociferation a fine ear could detect a shade of sensuous delight.

The third act pleased the gallery; the parquet had some pleasure in the work of Laura. The final scene dragged and made a dispiriting impression.

Protony, bewildered, uncertain in the matter of the result, stood near the box office with the treasurer as the audience passed through the lobby. He scrutinized faces eagerly, trying to read the verdict of the play. The countenance of the average auditor told him nothing—it was nonchalant, expressionless. The remarks were few and non-committal. Phelon, with his large, voluptuous blond wife on his arm, nodded pleasantly, saying, in passing: "Not at all bad, dear boy." Protony was electrified by this suggestion of a favorable critique; so elated, that he was emboldened to arrest Burrows, who walked along the lobby with bowed head—as if in perplexed thought—and who was not given to venturing opinions in advance of publication. "What do you think of it, Mr. Burrows?"

"It isn't worth a damn," replied the critic irritably.

Protony fell from exuberance to incertitude. He stood there, his emotions tense and horribly mingled,

until the lights were extinguished. Then he hurried to the stage entrance, where he found Laura waiting for him. The certainty of a personal success had made her joyful and she saw the world through purple lenses. She half convinced him that the play was safely launched. Burrows' remark she dismissed with the observation that he was inveterately brusque.

Nevertheless, as soon as he bade her good night, his subtle, doubting nature, inevitably prone to conjure up double contingencies, threw him anew into feverish perplexities. By the time he had reached his room success was no longer probable—it was impossible. The vociferous reception of the Board of Trade scene was cancelled by the slowness of the first act, the stupidity of the third and the unsatisfactory fourth. He again heard the restive gallery; once more he saw the hostile faces in the parquet. He disrobed mechanically, his body feverish, his head aflame. Between the sheets he whirled mentally. If the play fell, he would lose the little prestige left him. In the circumstances, what could he do? Seek an engagement with a company as general utility? Impossible! That were a confession of defeat. No; that would not do. He would organize a company and go on the road with plays once popular in large cities but never seen in towns; indeed, he might try one or two of Ringold's. He would—here Laura leaped to mind and the thought of her caused him poignant anguish. Himself always uppermost, she had not occurred to him in these night ramblings. He had tried to restore their former relations. A failure at the theatre he feared would nullify such a possibility. This fresh phase of the general fear burned him. He turned from one side to the other; threw off the covers; rearranged the pillows again and again; got up to lower the window still further and in passing the toilet case saw a decanter half-filled with whisky. He seized the squat bottle, placed the end of its thin neck to his mouth and drank the liquor as if it had been water. In a quarter of an hour—half an hour—he scarce knew how long, his mind became blurred; then unconscious.

CHAPTER VII.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

He emerged to lucidity by degrees, but his head was heavy, his body dry and hot. Struggling to a sitting posture, his stomach seemed leaden; misplaced. Near the decanter—the sight of it nauseated him—the small, circular nickel-plated timepiece indicated ten o'clock. He felt that he could not rise; but the morning papers—as this thought came to him he jumped to the floor and got into his clothes with trembling jerks, and hurried to the street. Not a newsboy was in sight—evidently they had all sold out. The clear sunlit air partly dissolved the mismatic shroud in which he had risen. Two squares down, at a corner, projecting from the extremities of the curb-stone he espied a news stand. With nervous, impatient strides he made for it. Of the five morning papers copies of three were unsold, *The Interior, The Times* and *The Advent; The Forum, The Daily Spirit* and *The Recorder* were not to be had. He crossed the street in bounds, entered a saloon, ordered a cocktail, fell into a chair and turned the leaves of *The Interior* for the editorial page. The last column was headed "Amusements" and directly under the caption "The Stedman Season" a long prospectus of the plays and players which the New York managers would present at Cooley's Theatre next month. Beneath this, a brief and off-hand notice of "The Millionaire". The critic thought a unique idea had been marred by wholly incompetent literary treatment. Except the mechanical effects, the presentation of the theme was not even commonplace—it was amateurish. Burton's work was praised; Laura's adulated. Here—Miss Darnby—was a fine talent that should be properly de-

veloped. So far, the lady had been misdirected, had lacked opportunity. That was all—a contemptuous condemnation.

Protony's hands trembled, not from last night's whisky, but from Burrows' disdainful shafts. It was several minutes before he could summon sufficient fortitude to open *The Times*. The lukewarm, indefinite decision, leaning toward a possible success and expressed in a strictly reportorial vein, gave him but little comfort. *The Advent's* judgment, written in the characteristic manner of a provincial reviewer, was cautiously neutral. Burton was "strong," Miss Darnby "good", the support "acceptable". Leaving the newspapers on the table, Protony went out, impregnated with an aching doubt. But there was Phelon—what had he written? After all, *The Forum* was the predominant journalistic force in matters theatrical. The most important opinion, then, was yet to be read; besides, there were *The Daily Spirit, The Recorder* and the evening papers. Four squares brought him to another periodical stand, but the morning editions were sold. Too impatient to walk the short distance to the business center, he took a tram car to Randolph Street, where he descended and hurried to the Sherman House.

Transient guests as a whole do not rise early, for they retire late—and they read at their last convenience; so there was a mass of newspapers—local and out-of-town—piled in square rows on a long counter next the cigar case. Protony seized *The Forum, The Daiy Spirit* and the *Recorder,* threw down a dime and, without waiting for the change, hastened to a red plush chair in the east corridor. Under the heading "Music and the Drama" *The Forum* contained half a column devoted to "The Millionaire." The first sentence thrilled Protony: "Clarence Protony and Caroline Fix did not disappoint their friends at Cooley's last evening. They succeeded in interesting everybody with their play, 'The Millionaire,' which, in the consecrated phrase of a local mediocrity, was 'an unqualified success'."

The pleasurable throb made by this approval was

intensified by the gratification of the fling at Burrows —the "local mediocrity" was Phelon's stamp for *The Interior's* dramatic editor. The story of the play—Phelon thought—was simple yet original and it was skillfully developed. The characters were taken from life's throng and were firmly drawn. Then the plot was given in detail. Histrionically, the performance, in the general aspect, was adequate. Burton as usual, displayed his mastery of the mechanism of the art of acting. In Miss Darnby there was a rounded proficiency surprising in one so young. She possessed the repose which imparts reposefulness to auditors. The smooth elegance of the presentation was in the highest degree creditable to Mr. Protony

The unreserved eulogy made Protony indifferent to what *The Recorder* might print. He turned the pages of that paper absolutely without eagerness. But as he read his attention became fixed, his indifference made way for pangs of uneasiness. The mise-en-scene was lauded, the actors commended. The play *per se* had merit from a constructive standpoint, but it could have no permanent value because the fundamental idea was commercial. Unfortunately, too, the play could arouse but limited interest, since boards of trade were confined to three or four cities and even there the comedy would appeal only to people who had a technical knowledge of such affairs. The bourse scene exempted, there was nothing in "The Millionaire" that was not conventional and mediocre. *The Daily Spirit* deemed it an unsuccessful fling at originality. *The Recorder's* was a logical criticism; the tone lucid and truthful; the style clear and unembarassed. Its direct diction denoted the mind of a young man. The contradictory views of *The Forum* and *The Recorder* created conflicting sensations in Protony. He again grew restive. He must walk; think. The telling stroke was that the play would prove incomprehensible to the masses. He had not thought of that—and he was now convinced of the truth of the observation. The *clou* of the play, the scene on 'change, which so far had extorted unanimous praise, would be unintelligible noise on the cir-

cuits which he had schemed to tour. What next, then? What could he do? In his wrought-up state it occurred to him that the evening press—*The Diary, The Mail* and *The Bulletin*—might coincide with Phelon. And in the last analysis, the box office might belie the opinion of the more part of the critiques. With big receipts, with the house filled nightly, he could tell Burrows and his crowd, "go hang!" The hope solaced him. Mentally relieved, he now felt the physical reaction of a feverish night. He would go to bed and sleep a couple of hours.

He slept many hours—until the cries of the newsboys aroused him. He was at the outer door in a few minutes putting a coin in the marvelously dirty hand that issued from the marvelously tattered sleeve of a knee-high urchin. *The Bulletin* had a full column on one of the forward pages. Many paragraphs told of Burton's professional experiences, of his personal attributes. Lines and lines were devoted to a description of the women's costumes, but of the play no judgment was given. Perplexed, exasperated, Protony threw aside *The Bulletin* and took up *The Diary*, which was brief and emphatic in pronouncing "The Millionaire" a success. *The Mail* gave a similar opinion.

The latest readings buoyed him. He repaired to the theatre to find that the house had been sold out for the next performance. Members of the Board of Trade had engaged all of the seats on the lower floor and the first gallery had been largely bespoken by the brokers' bookkeepers and settling clerks. Such luck Protony decided should be celebrated, celebrated in company with Laura—and that was just the sort of an occasion to facilitate a complete reconciliation with her! The thought elated him to the last degree. He asked the treasurer to advance him fifty dollars and then notified Laura by messenger, saying that Miss Fix, Burton, Mr. and Mrs. Phelon and a few others had been invited.

The second night "The Millionaire" was less trying for the stage management, but the audience was more boisterous. Cries peculiar to the Board of Trade;

shibboleths and shreds of commercial parlance were passed in the intermissions and during the scene on 'change the action was all but interrupted by trade phrases hurled from in front. Protony—in the wings this time—was relieved when the final curtain fell. In escorting Laura from the theatre several letters were handed her by the door-keeper as they passed out.

Surprised, she turned to Protony: "Why didn't he give me these when I came in?"

"Notes, letters and, above all, telegrams are never delivered to actors before the performance. It is an excellent rule. Bad news is a bad thing for a player to carry around with him during a performance. Those letters you have there probably are from admirers. You'll get them in every town if we go on the road, which I think we'll arrange to do, seeing that the play is drawing all right—provided, of course that you and Burton will go on tour."

Yes, she was willing. She was now in debt and so must do something to meet her obligations. On that score she need not worry, Protony intimated. His share of the profits at the theatre—well, they would talk it over later. Laura's touch on his arm lightened, as if to withdraw her hand; he therefore broke midway in his diplomatic offer to assist her. But the shot of acute infelicity was fugitive. He soon felt confident that he would regain her confidence.

The only private supper room—spacious, though of low ceiling—at "Tom's Chop House" was illuminated to a pitch in consonance with the garish brilliancy of the place and also entirely in accord with the mass of recklessly miscellaneous prints (representing, in varying inaccuracy, forgers and assassins, pugilists and painters, politicians and statesmen, authors and actors) strung on the wall in company with objects d'art, de chasse and de course; but these gave the haunt an appearance of pusillanimous bohemianism. Miss Fix and her broker brother, Jack; Phelon and his buxom, rakish wife; Burton and a society editor of expansive dimensions; and a very tall man—once

handsome, who might have been taken for anybody from a barber to a Russian prince—flanked by two showily prepossessing and conspicuously gowned women, were waiting for Protony and Laura. The society writer was introduced as Miss Primrose; the once handsome man and his friends as Belmont, Mrs. Harmon and Miss Clairville. Protony was then subject to the customary congratulations, over which Miss Fix presided with the air of a schoolmistress who permits her scholar to be praised. Seated, cocktails were ordered for all save Miss Fix, who asked for ginger ale. While the drinks were preparing, Mrs. Phelon explained that Teddy was not very well, so she had consented to his taking a little whisky a few minutes ago. Phelon, with closed eyes, half smiled: "And I charged it up to you, Prot., old boy," he drawled.

Protony answered effusively that he would he could always contribute to Mr. Phelon's happiness and contentment—or some phrase equally stilted and artificial.

For a few minutes there was awkward silence. Miss Fix clearly was a stranger to Bohemianism—she seemed ludicrously out of her element. Per contra, the two garishly attractive women fitted their environment—they were boldly unconventional, though plainly conscious of their physical perfections. Phelon was drowsy; but his wife, although mute, had a round smile for everybody; Laura studied faces. Evidently Jack's and Belmont's thoughts were far away. Protony was trying to think of something of general interest. The heterogenous company became more homogeneous after the first cocktail. Following the second course, wine was served, and the subtle flattery of the gentler drink soon relaxed all in a unison of good fellowship. Phelon awoke to the presence of the gathering; he even quoted a line on wine, from Keats. Mrs. Phelon beamed and pronounced the brand "good stuff, just like my Teddy's writings." All applauded—and the applause was mainly sincere. The exceptions were Miss Harmon and Miss Clairville, who were from New York. While Jack was telling an Irish story, Protony leaned

toward Phelon and whispered the question, who was Belmont? A broker who had failed, and now a solicitor for Jack's firm. His business record, though bad, was better than his social standing. He always had two or three alluring women about him—women as adventurous as they were seductive. Wealthy men used but despised Belmont.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CELEBRATION.

The wine was loosening the tongues and imaginations of Belmont's companions. Mrs. Harmon told an *historiette*, barely safe. That ended, Protony continued quickly with a clean, humorous anecdote, his purpose being to divert the conversation to a safer channel—he noticed a shade of dismay in Miss Fix's eyes, although her brother was amused. Protony now regretted that the steward had orders to serve yet more wine—and of a different brand. But the regret insensibly vanished as the intoxicant was drunk glass upon glass. However, he was aroused to some sense of a host's responsibility by a drastic incident. Mrs. Harmon withdrew from a black, diamond studded case two cigarettes, lit one and threw the other to Miss Fix with:

"Have a smoke, Miss Prude?"

For a minute the spinster alternately flushed and paled. She rose, remarking, "Such breeding and such familiarity are insufferable."

Phelon cooly and carelessly retorted for the familiar woman: "Why, how can there be breeding without familiarity?"

A chorus of laughter broke out, in which even Laura joined.

Miss Fix shook. "Come, Jack, this is disreputable company."

She swept to the door, her brother and Protony following, the latter protesting against Mrs. Harmon's conduct.

Protony returned in a few minutes to find his guests unrepentant. Mrs. Harmon had placed both

feet on the chair vacated by Miss Fix, her gown drawn to the knee. Belmont had taken Jack's seat and was throwing crumbs of bread at Miss Clairville. Laura, thrall to the influence of the wine and ambient atmosphere, listened to Phelon's audacious remarks. Mrs. Phelon smoked a cigarette.

Protony was greeted with: "Hello! Joseph got out of and away from a fix." Clairville said it.

Mrs. Harmon took it up: "Did you escape with your virtue intact, Joseph?"

"Ladies, ladies! I must insist that you desist. You are manifesting a shocking irreverance for a very estimable lady—and my collaborator," Protony derisively protested.

Mrs. Phelon had said nothing thus far, but as she half rose from the chair, her cheeks crimson and her eyes rakish, it was plain she would be venturesome. "Mr. Protony," she asked in an innocent manner, deliciously simulated, "do you think that Miss Fix could collaborate in anything more vital than a literary subject?"

"By Jove, that was good!" exclaimed her husband. "If you were not my wife I'd kiss you. You are always doing or saying something surprisingly bright."

"And you see, Eddie, it has been neither the lady nor the tiger."

Belmont demanded an explanation. "Don't speak in riddles. Tell me what you mean."

Not heeding Phelon's warning finger she explained that he had received a check for a hundred dollars from a weekly periodical for an essay on Stockton's story, "The Lady or The Tiger." In cashing the check for him the cashier of *The Forum* had jocularly asked: "What will you do with so much money, Mr. Phelon?" And Phelon had answered: "Well, it will either be the lady or the tiger."

"I'll see to it that it will not be the lady and I'll try to keep the money from the tiger," the blonde added.

More applause. "Admirable! Admirable! Splendid! The best thing I've heard in many a day. Let

us drink to Mrs. Phelon." This time all rose to Protony's response and in the rising, Protony, who had been comparatively moderate in his potations, noticed an impairment in Laura's self-control—her eyes were mischievous—her form oscillated. The discovery shocked him, who had paid no personal attention to the loose remarks and deportment of the other women. But signs of abandonment in Laura were to him as a visitation of sudden pain. He must do something to stop the carousal, or at least to divert its course. "Before we sit down," he suggested, "let us insist that Mr. Phelon make a philosophical speech or recite some of his own majestic lines."

"Good! Good! A speech! A poem!"

"A philosophical speech? No! No! I haven't attempted such a thing since my college days. Still —yes, I'll try to say something—if what comes first to my head flies straight to my tongue."

"Fellow mortals," he began with an air of mock pomposity. "There is an impenetrable curtain at either end of life. The first is the one through which we enter; its hues are white and purple, symbolical of hope, of youth. The second—through which we depart—is black, signifying death. At present we find ourselves between these curtains of morning and night. What is back of the shade and shroud we do not know—perhaps we shall never know. Our lot reminds me of a Scandinavian legend. A band of warriors were seated about a fire at night in the hall of an abandoned castle. During one of those silent, meditative moments when man, however primitive, feels solitude and the sublimity of the Creator, a bird flew in, fluttered around the fire and then disappeared into the darkness at the other end of the hall. 'Life,' said the chieftain, 'is as that bird; it comes we know not whence, enjoys the warmth of life for a moment, and goes we know not whither!' "

Laura interrupted: "But the bird found its nest, did it not?"

Protony was gratified to see that the current of

thought prompted by Phelon's remarks had subdued Laura's artificial gaiety.

"That is the answer one of the warriors made—and remember, the hope of an hereafter was expressed by a menial, not by the chief. The master mind, your skeptic, is above the common-place intelligence which bows down to tradition and accepts ideas second hand —from the past. The leader echoes Socrates: 'All we know is that we do not know.' We do not know. We cannot know; so, fellow mortals, in this mysterious game called life I say with Hoyle, 'when in doubt, take the trick.' Take the trick! We came from darkness and we return to darkness. Meanwhile we are between the curtains—a good enough place if you know how to live in it—how to exercise and how to apply your volition, for everything after all is volitional. Everything comes to him who is determined. The world belongs to the man of will. He utilizes his passions and instincts, he does not allow them to dominate him. He commands his forces as he would a charger. Keep active the fires within you but do not let them consume you. Control them. Control your mind, your body. Control your sentiment as you do your reason. Make yourself lovable to women and formidable to men. Gain power by every strong means, but, upon your life, do nothing mean or cheap. Do not lose yourself in anger; laugh but little, regret nothing. Forget the past; live in the present; fear not the future. When women weep and men bleed, be impassive as a pagan. But remember, above all, the most precious thing in life to a man not already forty who has himself well in hand is an amiable woman."

He stopped, raised his glass, depleted it slowly. He meditated momentarily, as one who is trying to recall something; then recited:

"Entends-tu Soupirer ces enfants qui s'embrassent?
On dirait, dans l'étreinte où leurs bras nus s'enlancent
Par une double vie un seul corps animé,
Des sanglots inouie, des plaintes oppréssées,
Ouvrent en frissonnant leurs lèvres insensés,

En les baisant au front le plaisir s'est pâmé
Ils sont jeunes et beaux, et, rien qu'à les entendre,
Comme un pavillon d'or le ciel devrait descendre.
Regare! Comme ils s'aime."

"I say, Phelon, will you kindly translate all that for us? I suppose it's good, but we would like to know." It was Belmont who wanted to know.

"I can tell you in a word what the lines mean. Youth—with a big Y. They are symbolic of youth; they are the apotheosis of youth."

"I'm done," he added. Protony, you are master of ceremony here. Call upon some one else to contribute to the entertainment."

Protony turned to Laura. "Miss Darnby, a recitation or a song, s'il vous plait."

The French phrase harked Laura back to the weeks of idleness when she had memorized, among other things, a number of French and German songs.. "Je suis grise, toute grise," from "La Perichole" occurred to her. With an audacity incited by the festive circumstances she sang—wine glass in hand—"I'm tipsy, oh, so tipsy" more or less correctly. There was a loud clapping of hands at the end, in which all but Phelon joined—Phelon had fallen into "an alcoholic trance" according to Belmont. Protony followed with a humorous speech in Irish accent. Then Belmont told anecdotes perilously libidinous. Mrs. Phelon, who, up to now had been drinking and laughing immoderately, rose. She put one hand on the table to steady herself: "I wa—wa—na—I wa—nt to shay tha Ted-dy an I've been marr—ried two yearsh an' I love him—im—more 'n ev—ev—er. An' I wan—wansht 't shay—" She stopped unable to fix another word. Rocking back and forth for a few moments where she stood she laughed incoherently, turned to Phelon—who was dozing—and fell upon his neck with an hysterical sob. Phelon awoke. "What is, dear boy? What can I do for you."

Protony suggested in a mushy voice: "Let's toast Mr. and Mrs. Phelon."

Belmont took it up: "To Mr. and Mrs. Teddy!"

Phelon was aroused. "To Gladys and to me? You are very good, dear boy. Gladys, they drink to you and to me."

They all emptied their glasses unsteadily. Mrs. Phelon drank tears which had fallen into her wine. She drank another potation and then another. Belmont started to tell a story several times, but lost himself in the first sentence. Mrs. Phelon, Mrs. Harmon and Miss Clairville talked simultaneously and incoherently. Laura laughed without knowing why. She presently found herself embraced by Phelon. Belmont kissed Mrs. Phelon. Mrs. Harmon took one of Protony's hands, Miss Clairville the other. There was a noisy confusion when somebody overturned the table with a terrific crash. A red round face appeared in the doorway and saw a mass of broken crockery, spilled wine and water and dilapidated victuals. "What's the matter?" the red, round face demanded, growing redder as it viewed the wreck.

"That'shal—all ri—right, Tom, de—dear boy; al—al—all right," mumbled Phelon, while the rest, momentarily stopped in their physical activity by the angry intrusion of the proprietor, echoed tipsily, "All —all ri—right, Tom; it'sh al—all right."

"The next thing will be a raid by the police. You'd better go home before I'm pulled. There are cabs at the door. Get in 'em an' get out 'o here."

The menace of a ride in a patrol wagon terrorized Protony, who, though in a sliding mood, had not wholly lost himself. "Tom's right," he seconded; "let's go."

After much swaying, stumbling, shuffling, Belmont, Mrs. Harmon and Miss Clairville were got into one carriage, the Phelons in a second, and Protony and Laura in a third.

CHAPTER IX.

EN ROUTE.

The next day Laura was attentive to Protony's plan of going on tour. He was uncertain about "The Millionaire," so he thought of adding "Charity Ball," "Men and Women" and a German play adapted by Ringold. "The Millionaire" could be played in cities, the other pieces in towns. Laura, approving, asked about the changes in the company, the name and character of the Ringold adaptation. Protony was not decided about the personnel of the company—that would depend upon the amount of backing. The German drama was well written, unconventional in theme, with a striking dénouement. The title "Modern Love," Laura thought would prove attractive. In the original, Protony explained, a man of thirty, holding a high position in the diplomatic corps, seduces the daughter of a labor agitator—a girl of pride and fine sensibilities, who had yielded in extraordinary persuasive circumstances, fortified by deep affection on her part and a promise of an early marriage given in all sincerity. The diplomatist becomes involved in financial difficulties. His debts are paid by a parvenu's vulgar widow who has a marriageable daughter, unattractive and ambitious. In the last act—following the engagement of the diplomatist and the parvenu—the agitator finds his daughter in the house of her rival, pistol in pocket. The father reasons with her—which is the greater sin, that which she has already committed or is about to commit? The seducer enters, and face to face with him, the father in turn forgets himself and grasps for the weapon. His daughter now stays his hand, observing as she looks at the

ignoble features of her rival: "He is not worth the powder in this pistol. I gave myself, but he has sold himself. Look at them, father. A mean and common pair. They are well mated."

Ringold had transferred the place of action from Berlin to Washington, and Protony feared that in the adaptation the logic of the original had been weakened; but he hoped the play would be a go in the provincial theatres. Laura did not share this hope. In her view it was only in large cities where literary innovation had a chance of acceptance. In ethics the masses are like women; and woman, being intrinsically an aristocrat, is conservative, clings to the conventionalities. And the further she is removed from the urban manner and thought the more absolute is her rule in matters of morality. Laura, born in a country town, explained the situation to Protony; told him that people in the interior were ultra-conservative; that they insisted sin and evil—in stories—in plays—be severely punished; that seduction was a crime heinous as murder; that a girl seduced was an outcast. She held that "Modern Love" would stand a better trial in the cities.

Then they discussed Burton. There was no doubt that his artistic talent and name had a commercial value where he was known and where good work was appreciated; but it was not certain that he would find due recognition in one-night stands. Laura was no judge of that, but she ventured a hint: she believed the Jewess, Miss Rosenau, would prove a useful acquisition. The woman was full of talent, had an intense temperament and boundless ambition, and would offer her services for a moderate salary just to get an opportunity. Protony acted upon the suggestion immediately by writing a note asking her to call at the theatre within the week, between seven and eight o'clock in the evening. She was there next day at seven, a quarter of an hour before Protony had come to the box office to look over the bookings. Yes, she would do anything to be rid of teaching—the odious drudgery, how she detested it! The terms? Mr. Pro-

tony could fix the salary as he pleased. Only let her get away from that hateful, that enervating school house. Very good; she could consider herself engaged. He introduced her to the treasurer: "Miss Rosenau, who will join our company at the end of this engagement. Kindly extend to Miss Rosenau the courtesy of the profession. I should like Miss Rosenau to see the play frequently, that she may familiarize herself with the characters."

She was consummately happy and her happiness found visible expression in her eyes, which shone complexly: Hope for an interesting future, joy at being delivered from an irksome profession; and through all a vindictive flash—somebody soon would be the victim of her reprisal. Protony, too, was satisfied; he had secured a member amenable to all circumstances; financial and utilitarian. He was also satisfied with the box office returns for that night. The Board of Trade scene was the talk of the town. It had been discussed into a sensation. He was now sure of success, and preparations for the tour—a scheme which until that morning had been a matter of secret reservation with him—proceeded with confidence. One of the initial steps was the engagement of an advance agent, a Fred Freeman, alert, astute and hardly literate, a product of South Clark street, whose memory did not include recollections of progenitors, but readily reverted to the time when he polished boots on week days and sold newspapers on Sundays, a small, slender, gritty fellow, who knew the ropes of the cities and the routes in the provinces. The contract signed, he urged that Protony purchase about two hundred dollars' worth of diamonds at once. He insisted that it was an investment absolutely essential to favorable bookings on the road; explaining that an advance man well groomed, well dressed and with an abundance of jewelry always commanded a better percentage than the fellow with unadorned hands and shirt front. To the provincial manager, gems were the signs of prosperity—one must present a shining front in the country. Protony was persuaded. He drew the

amount from the box office and handed the money to Freeman, who appeared the following day resplendent in a silk tile, a flaming cravat and blinding rings and shirt studs. And he was fully primed for his mission. He got together scores of copies of *The Forum* containing Phelon's critique of "The Millionaire" and had prepared a minutely arranged itinerary, commencing at Baraboo, Wisconsin, and terminating in the far northwest.

All but three members of the company were enlisted to play the circuit. One was voluntarily omitted; two would not or could not go on the road. Hearing of the defections, Miss Rosenau proposed Miss Carr, who, since her companion's engagement, had suddenly developed a propensity for the stage. Laura approving, the schoolmistress was taken on provisionally. Of the remaining vacancies in the roles of "The Millionaire," one was a minor male part which Protony himself could play under an assumed name; the other, the character of a dashing speculator, was assigned to a young man introduced by a dramatic agency, Raymond Belleville, whose presence was as euphonious as his name.

Laura was impressed by the contrast between the departure at Chicago and the arrival at the diminutive station in the north. In leaving, the strollers were lost amongst the swarming and impatient crowds which pressed against the high iron gates, eager to get into the trains that would deliver them from the crushing conditions of a crude, monstrous city to the towns, villages and country seats on the lake's shore and amid the hills and forests of Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin.

At Madison there occurred a startling episode. Two men of athletic stature and searching eyes entered the coach occupied by the Protony Dramatic Company. They were accompanied by the conductor. A man—hitherto silent, unobtrusive—who occupied a seat at the other end of the car leaped for the door. But a porter was on the platform holding the knob. The men with the searching eyes were beside the hitherto

silent, unobtrusive man in an instant. There was a momentary struggle. When the quiet fellow turned, his hands were captive in broad, thick, shining manacles, connected by a slender steel chain. The negro trainman opened the door; the detectives and their prisoner disappeared. Not a word had been spoken. The conductor explained: "A criminal, one of the most dangerous in the country." He had eluded the officers at the Chicago depot, but had been recognized by him (the conductor), who had wired the Madison police.

But nature's panorama elicited far different emotions in Laura. As soon as the train shot out of Wisconsin's capital, there was a sweeping change in topography. Small lakes abounded. Hills, bluffs, then mountains appeared in picturesque concatenation. The ever-varying picture culminated impressively. A circle of mountains, vine, pine and rock clad. Within the circle an immense mirror of water, cold and brilliant under the sun that fairly capped the western mountains. Sand, white, firm and smooth, margined the lake and upon the margin an hotel, a few villas and a wine hut of pine logs. Not a sound but the breathing of the engine, and when that had ceased taking breath the silence was absolute. The mountains barred the world and admitted the heavens. They were walls of grandeur; walls covered with statuesque trees through whose broad branches, at intervals, the winds murmured melancholily; walls of gray rocks strangely formed, amid which crept wild animals and unpoisonous reptiles, and winding vines, bearing potential joy and laughter.

The cry "Baraboo" shocked them to a realization of the cares of civilization. From the low and leprous looking station the 'bus went down a precipitous hill; across the bridge, which resounded the wheels and horses' hoofs like the remote thunder that precedes a summer's rain storm; then up a sheer acclivity. At the top, the business quarter, and in the center of this a square box-like hotel of rough stone.

The fat, flabby, clean shaven landlord, who looked

as if he would say and later did say "Yea" for "Yes," scrutinized the company with a wrinkled brow for a moment; but the creases disappeared directly he took stock of his visitors' clothes. The women were told off in pairs. The men with the exception of Protony, shared rooms in twos, rooms that were all alike; the floors of unglossed wood; walls disfigured by chromos of screeching badness; mohair sofas, fashionable in the early '60's; upholstered chairs; a clothes closet resembling an upright coffin, banged against the wall. Beside a low, white bed, a strip of hand-woven carpet. But the rooms were light, airy, wholesome, and the genuine quietude, contrastingly reposeful to the attritive din of Chicago, induced studious thoughts.

When Rosenau took "Une Vie" from her satchel, Laura, in delighted surprise, asked if her room mate understood French. Yes, almost as well as German, which she commanded as readily as English. Negotiating with the quickness and facility of young women thrown in sudden intimacy, it was agreed that the ex-teacher should attune Laura's ear to the language which the latter now had by sight only.

"We've always called you Rosey—you've never told me your Christian name," said Laura, in bantering reproach as she kissed in gratitude the full, red, Semitic lips of her companion.

"You mean my Jewish name—Rebecca, of course. Can you conceive of a Jewess with a face like mine with any other label? Look at this nose, these lips, these eyes. Ah!"—she made a gesture of angry despair—"they will always tell against me on the stage."

Laura protested. She recalled the many Jewesses, of pronouncedly Oriental features, famous in dramatic art, "You, Becky—I'll abridge the name—have a very strong face. At present you are a bag of bones and a bunch of nerves. You need more flesh, a more agreeable expression. Your look is too sombre, too harsh, too bitter, or too embittered, rather. But now that you are in a calling for which you feel that you are fit—toward which you have striven—you will be happier and your contentment will reflect itself physic-

ally. The main thing in life—some one told me—is to do something in which you are wholly interested. Don't worry, you'll change."

"I'm afraid it will take sometime before I'll be presentable. I wish I now had some of your flesh." This was said enviously as she looked at Laura's perfect form. When they retired, Becky's admiration deepened to absolute ecstacy. Oh, Laura, what a figure! You are too beautiful! And then look at me."

"Why, Becky, you have a very pretty shape after all. Your waist is exquisite. Your hips want more breadth and your bosom is undeveloped, but the contours are there. You need more weight, that's all. Say, do you pray? I don't—I haven't since I left home."

"Pray? No. I know the Lord's prayer in Hebrew, but I haven't recited it since my engagement was broken off. I observe none of the Jewish holidays—not even the Day of Atonement. I'm Jewish in nothing but name—and face. Oh, this nose, this nose." She struck the feature desperately as if she would reduce or flatten it.

"But, Becky, Becky! Your Jewish blood is a valuable asset. It is distinctive; is something to be proud of. I recently read somewhere that a Jew, if well directed, almost always distinguishes himself. The 'ages upon ages' of persecution has purified and sensitized the Jew; has made him keenly susceptible to the best in civilization. A Jew, the writer said, is seldom vicious and never brutal. In the lower orders he is at times vindictive; often tricky and a cheat; often vulgar and insufferably intrusive; but with education and, above all, freedom, the vulgarity and intrusiveness and the shocking defects due to centuries of oppression disappear. There is enough of the Oriental in the Jew to make him like Disraeli; vain, and fond of glitter and pomp; but the Orient, the author says, also has given the Jew warmth and a luxurious imagination; and it is the Oriental quality which makes nearly all of them who take to the stage good actors."

A Semitic trait not touched upon by Laura subtly

showed itself next morning when Protony—upon Freeman's suggestion and insistance—hinted to the handsome members of the company that they promenade about the town for an hour or two. He did not give a reason, but the experienced Burton whispered to Laura it was to attract attention, create comment, excite interest, and thus, perhaps, make a big house. When Miss Rosenau heard of it, she instantly amplified the hint: "Why not distribute a few dollars among the women and let them do some shopping? This would give the show the good will of the tradesmen, would start gossip among the women of the town and so on." The look Freeman gave the Jewess was that of a pupil toward a master who had made a marvelous discovery. Everybody good naturedly fell in with the piquant advertising ruse. Many stores were leisurely visited and articles of small price purchased here and there. Men stared admiringly. Women looked and listened curiously, enviously. The smartly conceived parade enhanced the attendance at the theatre in the evening when the exiguous and ill ventilated auditorium was well filled with an audience fairly comprehensive of the mental exigencies of "The Charity Ball."

It was a propitious start for everybody, especially for Laura's sympathetic *Anna Cruger* and Rosenau's hoidenish *Bess Van Buren;* both were promptly effective; the Jewess, from her first scene to the last, romped through her role with an authoritative abandon that astonished Burton and Protony. The latter saw, too, that he had fallen on a profitable acquisition in Raymond Belleville. The young man betrayed hopeless mediocrity, but his handsome person at every entrance was welcomed with a palpable flutter. And it was acclaimed—the applause was unmistakably feminine; light pattering, fugitive—at every exit. But Burton's vigor and vitality, his convincing talent and decided personality dominated the stage. In the fustian character of *Dick Van Buren* he held the house. Protony noted that the tried professional who assumed *Mrs. Camilia de Peyster* would never do. Though not old,

she was exercised in the bad old school of acting; high chinned, high voiced; high colored in manner, method and attire. Miss Carr—following preliminary nervousness—did so well in the obscure role of *Sophie*—she was potentially suggestive—that he decided at the last curtain to exchange the parts between the two women. The *Phyllis Lee* of Alice Sutherland also was a physical find—a stunning blonde in the first maturity of married development, and recently separated from her husband—but by consequence disqualified for the pseudo-sentimental and harrowingly lachrymose part. The *Alexander Robinson* was a breezy, fun-loving youth, Felix Heman, who paired well with Rosenau's *Bess Van Buren.*

The bounteous receipts warmed Protony to generosity. He announced that he would stand treat after the performance; but when about to open his purse he found that he was in a country town; the saloons and restaurants closed at nine o'clock; at the hotel nothing was to be had after that hour. So all of the company, save Laura, immediately retired. Miss Rosenau was exhausted to the last nerve and fell asleep at once. Laura's nerves were excited, not worn. She resumed the reading of one of her companion's books, "Hélène," by Ivan Turgenieff, in French. Her vocabulary was now grown considerable; it encompassed the living words of the faithful translation of the Russian author, whose commingled realism and idealism obtained their greatest triumph in this story, so pervaded and colored by the light of the moral world, in the center of which is a young girl of a will so calmly ardent and intense that she needs nothing but opportunity to become one of the figures about whom admiring legends cluster.

But Laura stopped before the dark termination of the tale was reached. It was past midnight when she closed the book. She extinguished the lamp, drew the covers carefully over Rosenau's shoulder and opened the window to air the room. She stood at the opening for a moment. Except for one light in the distance the darkness was complete. In that light was a

youth seated at a table, bent over a book. A hand was on the pages, another rested the head, which was covered with dark, thick hair. He was absorbed in the volume—a country boy, Laura thought, with a literary passion. A dog barked. A fugitive wind brought sobs from a water wheel in a pond hard by. Then an absolute hush. The silence was of the profound, impressive kind; one of those perfectly tranquil moments —so rare in tossed and jostled lives—when the earth disappears, and in which there is revealed to the soul something of the Infinite Unknown; and when one feels most intimately that there is somewhere a calm, spiritual existence which will permanently compensate for the cruel attritions and the harsh tempests of the everyday world.

That moment in the night—when she had caught a glimpse of the sublime—was secreted in Laura's subconsciousness, from whence it darted to memory but a few times in her fated life—the last time in the awesome instance when flesh and spirit parted.

CHAPTER X.

LETTERS AND OTHER IMPORTUNITIES.

It was still dark when there were violent knocks at the door. The noise—repeated in diminishing tones down the corridor—awoke Rebecca with a start. Remembering the word which had been passed at the theatre that the Company would take an early train for Madison, she aroused Laura. The breakfast—scant and hurriedly prepared—was taken in silence and semi-somnolence. Burton was grumpy, the others drowsy. The ride—in and on an omnibus—in the fresh air of the dawn to the station put the Company in more equable spirits. They had only a few minutes to wait for the train. A day car was quickly linked to the seven coaches brought down from St. Paul and in less than two hours Madison was reached. They were driven up an easy incline at the top of which—overlooking four toylike lakes—was the capital, posited in a green square. The hotel fronted this and afforded from the upper floor an unimpeded view of the city, which was not really a city, and yet above a town in population and architecture.

The Company had been booked for two nights. "The Charity Ball" had been advertised for both performances. It had proved a perplexing date for Protony. The place had seemed to warrant something stronger than "The Charity Ball;" still he had nothing more fit to offer. "The Millionaire" was incomprehensibly commercial; "Modern Love" literary caviar. It had then occurred to him that he ought to have a play for just such a booking—something between "The Charity Ball" and "Modern Love"—and in running over the successes of the decade "Sweet Laven-

der'' had come to memory. He had written at once to New York for the piece and in his mail at the hotel was a package—forwarded from Chicago—containing a dozen copies of Pinero's early manner in dramatic composition.

The first performance at Madison was attended to the last seat in the gallery and the many students from the University lent a vociferous air to the audience. The next morning Protony was at once grieved and gratified in his selection of ''Sweet Lavender'' to read in a curt review of the production that Madison was worthy of something better, from a company that had finer to offer, than the cast-off and service-worn delinquencies of Daniel Frohman's repertory, Laura, on the contrary, was elated. Her woman's pride and her sex's natural vanity were gratified by numerous letters expressive of admiration of her art and person. All, or nearly all, of the epistles were from students. Some of these youths solicited the privilege of a personal acquaintance. Two of them boldly proposed a rendezvous. Rebecca, who had not been favored in that way, told Laura that Miss Carr had received three notes from the University—all invitations to supper after the performance. Her comment, ''I'm surprised that she should get such notes, for she never looked across the footlights at anybody,'' was intended as deprecatory of Carr's physical charms. The observation was not impartial, for the former schoolmistress made a fetching *Mrs. De Peyster.* Blonde, of the golden persuasion, rounded neck, arms, bosom and hips, she was of the type that appealed to the ordinary taste of the ordinary man—and to unsophisticated youth—quite in contrast to the epicurean attractiveness—mental as well as sensuous—of Laura, who then was made aware of the extreme difference of character and appearance between herself and Carr. Protony, too, perceived that Carr also would prove a drawing card. At the same time his perception—made poignant by the jealousy which unrequited affection keeps viable—suggested that Carr might be an effective antidote against a growing plethora on the

part of Laura, who, since the last week of "The Millionaire" in Chicago, had displayed a mounting proneness to establish a distinction between herself and some of the other members of the Company. Lastly, Rebecca was not unenvious of her formerly intimate friend. Her embodiment of *Bess Van Buren* was so natural, so spontaneous, so within the confines of nature, that the audience took it as a matter of course and omitted to manifest its appreciation of her ease and harmony in stage pictures. Unprepossessive, in a strictly physical sense, there was no mail for her, a destitution that wormed the more in the circumstance of Carr's indiscreet vanity in volunteering to read the letters she received.

"Oh, you are too kind," the Jewess answered, "but I don't think I should care to hear them. I wouldn't handle the precious things too much were I you. I'd carefully preserve them. You may not get any more when we reach the big cities, where they care more for mind than for matter."

The derision inflamed Carr. "It's a pity you can't borrow Laura Darnby's shape as well as her ideas."

The tart repartee took place on the stage within the hearing of Protony.

"Ladies, another word of this and I shall fine you. There must be no contentions in the theatre."

He was in ill humor himself. The sales at the box office were light for the second night. The town threatened to resent a repetition of "The Charity Ball."

The threat was fulfilled. Although the gallery was well filled, the balcony was almost deserted and about the only occupants of the parquet and orchestra circle were students who quite succeeded in the purpose of compensating for lack of numbers by solid, roundly aggressive, satisfactory and heaven-defying demonstrativeness, emphatically so between the acts, when no peace was possible until Laura and Carr had appeared half a dozen times before the curtain.

In Milwaukee the Company's reception was contrastingly undemonstrative. The audience consisted mostly of Germans, who, knowing Burton only, ap-

plauded him, but gave no other sign of recognition or appreciation until the curtain was lifted on the Board of Trade scene—the play was "The 'Millionaire." This was put on two nights. "The Charity Ball" was given twice, at a matinee and a third evening performance. Meanwhile rehearsals had been called every morning for "Sweet Lavender." Laura was cast for *Lavender,* Carr for *Minnie Gilfillan* and Rosnau for the oldish *Ruth Rolt;* Burton took *Dick Phenyl,* Belleville *Clement Hale* and Protony *Geoffrey Wedderburn.* At the third rehearsal the owner of the theatre—a brewer, enormously rich—became importunate in his attentions to Laura.

From the moment of arrival when he had seen her pass the box office his annoying manifestations of admiration had risen until they had become grossly displayed importunities. Several supper invitations had been sent to the hotel. The first was courteously declined, the others unanswered. The night before, after the performance, there had been a carriage at the stage door with the brewer beside it in an attitude of entreaty. Laura had refused, and turning to Belleville, who was at the entrance, had asked him to escort her, instead of waiting for Protony or Rosenau; and Protony had breathed a whiff of jealousy when a few minutes later he had been told that Laura had gone with the handsome actor. Laura explained in the morning on the way to rehearsal—and the explanation was corroborated by the brewer's presence in the box directly the rehearsal had commenced.

Protony, in a high tension, demanded that the box be vacated. The brewer, in a thick, asthmatic voice, replied: "This is my theatre. I built it. I own it; and every engagement here stipulates that the lower stage box is to be at my disposal."

"I don't care whether or not it is your theatre; whether you built it or whether you own it. Your contract does not permit you to be here at rehearsals and make a nuisance of yourself. If you don't get out of here at once there'll be no performance to-night, and I'll tell the newspapers why."

The threat proved effective. The ponderous roué shambled out of the box sullenly. But he was there at the rise of the curtain in the evening, sodden with drink. His presence disturbed Laura acutely lest he commit some tipsy indiscretion. He glared at her, now with a galliard air, again in a ferocious mood. He applauded her indescriminately—at every entrance, every exit. The audience caught the situation, which deepened Laura's embarassment, a feeling that was not relieved when in the wings, for there she encountered the obvious jealousy of Protony, who followed her every look and gesture. Both were glad not to find a carriage at the door—perhaps the proprietor had become too befuddled to continue his offensive address.

But both were disconcerted when they arrived in Chicago to find Ross waiting for them at the depot with a splendid brougham. He insisted that they go to his hotel for the one night they were to be in Chicago before starting for Kansas City. Protony would not accept and his refusal prompted Laura to decline. Ross did not completely succeed in repressing his anger; but he had the tact to quickly invite Carr and Rosenau. The former accepted, the latter refused—the Jewess' readily affectionate and gregarious nature had developed in Laura's intimacy, with whom she was now in full sympathy.

The members of the Company who had relatives in Chicago went to their homes for the night. Laura, Rebecca, Protony, Burton and Belleville took a street car on the line passing the depot, crossed the river and registered at an hotel contiguous to the station of the railway which would take them to Kansas City. Protony was morosely silent until they got to the hotel, when he turned to the Jewess with: "Miss Rosenau, will you excuse us for a few minutes. I wish to speak with Miss Darnby."

"I want to know," he demanded when they were in one of the small parlors, "who informed Ross of our route."

His tone was peremptory, his manner affrontive.

He challenged resentment. "Why don't you ask him? Why ask me?"

"Because I believe it is you who have kept him posted."

"Believing that—being so well informed yourself—why do you ask?"

Her spirited answer quelled him. He became solicitous. "Laura, tell me, have you corresponded with him?"

She reciprocated: "I assure you that I have not."

"Who in the world could have told him?"

"A member of the Company, I presume; or perhaps he saw our route in a dramatic paper."

She did not say she suspected Carr, whose willingness to keep Ross posted was traceable to several motives, all leading to the main intention of doing Carr some good and Laura a great deal of harm; for example, Protony's jealousy might be worked up to a degree—and sustained—where an irreparable breach between him and Laura would occur; again, the possibility of Laura leaving the company and joining Ross—pursuant to that gentleman's promotive inducements; or failing that—by way of a last chance—she herself might find effective force with him. And Carr's ready acceptance of Ross' carriage invitation confirmed Laura in the validity of her intuition, fortified by Carr's demeanor toward Ross the next morning, when he escorted her to the depot. She thanked him profusely, ostentatiously, she gave him her hand which she forgot to withdraw, smiling and talking, holding her face close to his the while. He at first was confused, then irritated. He suddenly turned, walked directly to Laura, who stood apart from the group on the platform bidding good-by to friends, and said in accents of sincere apology: "I wished to come earlier so that I could have a talk with you, but Miss Carr prolonged our start to the last possible moment, although last evening she seemed anxious to be here early."

Laura answered lightly; if it was merely to speak with her it had been useless to have arrived sooner,

for she had just come. This slight perversion of fact was actuated by an illogical—and by consequence feminine—idea that it would alleviate her rankle against Carr, whose double motive intrigue was divined rather than read. Ross wished to reiterate the assurance that he was her friend, that she must promise to command him whenever it was possible for him to serve her. The theatrical career is beset with difficulties and accidents; one can never tell what will happen, however properous a company at the beginning.

Laura had learned that a woman with a disillusioned past is grateful for a man's well-meant friendship; it is comforting, sustaining, even in these times of growing independence for women. She showed her gratitude frankly, bidding him good-by with a nervously warm hand shake and an illumined countenance. This provoked a malicious smile from Carr and prevented a repression of Protony's feelings, who, when the train had started, observed: "I suppose you are sorry, after all, that you didn't accept his invitation last evening."

She studiously refrained from controverting him, calculating that silence would disturb him more than a tart retort; and the next day as they were approaching Kansas City he apologized—they had not exchanged a sentence in the interval; he had spent most of his time in the buffet car, she in reading.

"So you have thought it over and found that to show gratitude is not a horrible offense?"

She soon forgot him in the abounding sense of nearing Missouri—the state of her nativity. Her thoughts reverted to home, to her father, her mother.

She would like to embrace her mother—to meet those alert brown eyes whose flash had not been dimmed by the lost illusions that had depressed the countenance to wanness and waste. Her wish to see her father was alloyed by fear of him and discontent with herself so far as her conduct related to having severed home ties. She knew that Ruhland had sternly disapproved of her course from the hour she left home and the thought of meeting him was disquieting. She won-

dered how he would receive her, how she should greet him, how—"Kansas City!"

The porter shouted the name. The train stopped in a confusing din of bells, belching smoke, hissing steam and multi-voiced cries in a humid, palpable atmosphere charged with assailant odors. It all reminded Laura of the first sensation imparted by Chicago, yet here the atmospheric impurities were denser, deadlier, the noises harsher, cruder. Looking up from the station at the foot of the hill, Laura saw a repulsively scabrous sight. The heights, sheer and jagged, were strewn with leprous habitations; black, rotting shanties that looked as if they could not resist the weakest wind; hovels in the midst of decayed desolation; squalid huts thrown in dark, spawning squalor; low, broken rotting fences; the lanes and streets a mass of mud and debris; the walks narrow strips of dilapidated boards. Up this acclivity of foulness a tramway operated by cable. From the top Laura looked down. The spectacle was afflicting from above as it was from below. Through a moving veil of cinders and smoke she saw pitchy, sooty depots covered with advertisements. Near these stations a heavy slimy river; the thick grimy waters crawled as a monstrous serpent and glistened for very blackness. It was impossible to distinguish the line of demarcation between the polluted stream and the banks; the broad, filthy borders seemed to be the stagnant part of the river and were heaped with the refuse of the city—garbage of every kind, offal of every stench. Between the muck-midden and the hill side, a shed here and there which harbored the impaired or discarded utilities of a railway; scattered among the loosely built yellow pine hutches were broken-down engines and ruined freight cars. And everywhere dirt and debris, debris and dirt. It was the valley of hellish clangor, of filth and premature desolation.

Laura turned from the appalling view and found a restorative scene in front of her; a wide arboreal street of home-like houses, each in the center of kempt, spacious gardens. A turn, and midway in the square the car stopped before a large,, imposing hotel. As she

walked through the corridor Laura was delighted to find herself featured on the posters which dotted the walls. Her name stood out in huge, black letters and beneath a parenthetical line, in small type, reading, "A Kansas City Girl." Some one had told Fred Freeman she was from Missouri, so acting upon the broad license of a theatrical agent he had conferred the honor upon Kansas City. Protony explained to her that this was a pressman's privilege—or ruse—which usually swelled the receipts. He added banteringly, "If we ever play in St. Louis you will be born there. It is not a new dodge. There are several actresses who have as many as seven—the Homeric number—birthplaces. You'll have only two—a modest beginning."

CHAPTER XI.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PSYCHIC WORLD.

Protony had decided to produce "Sweet Lavender" at Kansas City. He called the rehearsal at nine o'clock, an hour earlier than customary. Laura had formed a mentally seizable conception of *Lavender*, but found it impossible to give it physical expression at the repetition. She was inclined to blame the environments, which impressed her as exceedingly unpropitious. The theatre, though small, was not cozy; it had the appearance of precipitate deterioation. The auditorium looked infinitely dreary with the chairs draped in soiled Holland covers; a few straggling sunbeams accentuated the dismal darkness. Then the interruptions were frequent. Burton disappeared several times and had to be sent for when his cue was given. Once in one of Laura's effective situations, Carr was not present and was found below in confidential conversation with Freeman, who had completed his bookings and was traveling with the Company. The disturbances appeared to be endless and Laura was highly susceptible to them. Scene shifters, stage carpenters, loud-voiced directions—all went to her nerves. No illusion seemed possible. There were six hours of this the first day and six more the next, when the play was to be produced.

She came to her room in the hotel in the afternoon, disgusted, disheartened, exhausted. Flitting through the wearisome numbness was a recurring dread of failure. To present a living—a flesh and blood—*Lavender* seemed beyond her power. She saw the part well enough but could not grasp it; could not make it her own. With her head heavy with lines, with the sweet

London girl hovering over her, she sank to the pillow.

She was gently awakened by Rebecca at fifteen minutes before the dinner hour. She hastily dressed, the speeches and the business of Pinero's heroine besetting her. At the table *Lavender* still was persistently intrusive. She was insensible to her environment—heard nothing, saw nobody, ate without the slightest appreciation of that function. Freeman's professional deception about Kansas City being her birthplace unconsciously had inculcated her with an ambition to excel here. And she was terrified by the fear lest she have nothing to sustain, to fortify the ambition. She knew the words, the exits, the entrances—knew the mechanism—of the role, but the spirit of the part eluded her. She had become a mystery to herself. could not comprehend this lack of confidence, this want of understanding. Was it extreme nervousness? Had she become self-conscious, or supersensitive? Heretofore, in Chicago, her fear had been wholly physical—ordinary stage fright—which she had soon quelled. Now it was a psychological obsession which would not away.

It seemed impossible to remain in the dressing room, where Rosenau, with much less experience, sat tranquilly going over *Ruth Rolt* for the last time. She went upstairs and reached a wing at a moment when Burton's appearance as *Dick Phenyl* was heartily acclaimed. His make-up, Laura even in her perturbed state noticed, was marvelously vivid of the alcoholic barrister, the hair frowsy, the eyes bleared, the nose coppery; the mouth infirm—a face conveying the idea of original strength of mind and character ravaged and debased by drink. The voice—more than the unsteady frame and uncertain hands—connoted ruin; it was tremulously raucous—such degraded tones as are heard in a police court on a Monday morning when the charge is "Drunk and Disorderly."

"That is nature, that is truth," Laura thought. "Oh, shall I ever—" She heard her cue. In scene, self-consciousness left her. She merely felt herself in a high light, perceived a black mass—the audience—abutting

the high light. An intermittent noise came from that high light. But she did not know for whom the applause.

In the first entr'act, when going to her room, she passed Protony. His look seemed strange—she did not know what to make of it. Had she impaired the success of the performance? Rosenau was not there. She was disappointed in not finding the Jewess, who, she knew, had watched her from the wing and who probably could explain Protony's singular expression. Now she realized the fugitive, the impermanent character of the actor's art. The musician may hear his composition; the author may read his book or see his play; the painter may see the effect of his brush; the sculptor's work is revealed to him at every stroke of the chisel; but the actor's highest inspirations are recorded in sand, are written in water. He is left to his feelings, his intuitions, and these are often deceptive, illusory.

At the end of the second act as she was descending, limp and fatigued, to the dressing room, some one whispered in her ear: "Oh, you are acting admirably. You and Burton are carrying the performance." It was Rosenau. Laura revived instantly. The eulogy was as an electric infusion of new life. Her fatigue, her enervation vanished. And she was wholly conscious that this brief breath of praise had transformed her. A line from Carlyle leaped to her memory: "Talent of any sort is generally accompanied by a peculiar fineness of sensibility; of genius this is the most essential constituent." She must have some talent, after all, to be so quickly and thoroughly affected by a passing word.

She made the last act, with its conventional yet pleasing termination, convincing to herself, and felt the warmth, sincerity and gratitude of approval that came up from the dark mass at the final curtain. The feeling that she had done justice to herself and her position was verified by the press notices. In *The Epoch's* crudely but earnestly written half column Burton and Laura were the only subjects of appreciation.

The Planet believed Miss Darnby—"Our Kansas City girl"—to be "one of the best actresses in the country even if she be less known than several who parade as stars." Two evening papers presented, in double column width, Laura's picture. Protony brought the journals to Laura's room whilst Miss Rosenau was absent. Her sensitive ear detected a note of forced effusion in his congratulations and through his manner there penetrated a suggestion of a strange esuriency. He took both her hands voluntarily. He leaned toward her. She drew back quickly to evade the kiss.

"No; I'm not prepared for such a reconciliation."

He reddened, then whitened. Tortured pride, jealousy, despair were successively mirrored upon his features.

His wish for a re-establishment of their former relations had been prompted by selfishness as well as affection. Her performance of *Lavender* told him—he saw and felt it—that she was developing artistically; he perceived that she was catching glimpses of the psychic world seen by the intellectually elect. He feared that she would rise above him, would be independent of him.

"Have you become absolutely indifferent?"

"No, but I am resolved to be true to my better, my higher nature."

A knock interrupted the strange scene. Rosenau came in and asked where the Company would go after the Kansas City engagement. Protony replied, "Omaha," and went out without a glance at Laura, who had read his conflicting emotions in his face. At the theatre that evening he passed her several times without evidence of recognition. He spoke frequently with Carr, assuming an attitude of earnestness the while. At first Laura was amused at his boyish attempt to pique her; but her nerves and experience were not equal to a persistent repetition of the intrigue devised by Protony. Gradually and imperceptibly her fine susceptibility became ruffled under the fleering glances of Carr. She went to Protony and asked a casual question—as a means to a tentative approachment. Be-

lieving that his petty ruse was succeeding he answered with an air of studious indifference which inclined Laura toward further capitulation. She was ready to offer additional overtures when something—pride or intuition, she hardly knew what—intervened and rescued her from a submission that had cheapened her—not to him but to herself. She expressed her thanks for his reply to her empty question with an assumption of indifference similar to his own and paid no more attention to him that night.

She was made aware of her heightening sensitiveness a few days later when she was aroused at dawn to catch an early train for Omaha. The strain of insufficient sleep harrowed her. She was chilled by the ride to the station in a 'bus in which the Company was huddled as so many head of cattle; was weak for the lack of breakfast which the cook declined to prepare at an irregular hour. She felt, too, humiliation in being designated in the train as if she were a number or at best an insignificant entity, for Freeman accompanied the conductor through the car and pointing to the players individually—a collective fare had been paid—said: "There's one, there's one, and there's another, there's another and here's another and there, there; yes, he's one, too, and so is she, and she and this one." Protony, hardened to this custom of theatrical transportation, could not be impressed by that which went to Laura's fiber. Rosenau accepted it good naturedly, her philosophy being just a bit lessened by noticing Laura's extreme annoyance. The others took it as a matter of course. They became impatient, however, as the hours passed and no meal was served. Freeman had advanced an indefinite hope, when they were on their way to the depot in Kansas City, of a breakfast "soon." Near the noon hour there was a stop at something consisting of a station and a few loosely constructed houses, scattered on either side of the tracks. Freeman announced that there was a "lunch counter inside." Laura's associates precipitated themselves upon sandwiches of stringy ham and dry cheese, anaemic pies, shrivelled

fruit and murky coffee. The broad astonishment of the passengers at the coarse Bohemianism of her companions did not escape Laura and in that instant shame was more poignant with her than hunger. At the same time the momentary animalism of the hurry and scurry for food revealed, momentarily, the difference between her kind and the world at large. Her class, taken generally, was not, after all, many removes from the vagabondage of old when even the most favored of players wore livery; was really bottomed in irregularity, irresponsibility, superficiality; was forgetful of the past, flighty in the present and apprehensive of the future; had a small, distorted and unreal view of life. They were not children of the world. They inhabited a narrow and artificial circle outside of which they assumed there was nothing of significance. Although of a higher type, Protony in the final analysis was a stroller; but whose finer imagination and sensibilities caused him to feel more keenly thwarted ambition or unrequited affection. It was the stroller in him which prevented his having more than one idea or desire at a time, so that to him at present Laura represented the all in all of existence. He imagined her to be—perhaps she really was—his inspiration. He held her responsible for what seemed to him unattainable aspirations. He believed she should be the receptacle of his every mood, his disappointments and satisfactions, his dejections and enthusiasms, his joys and sorrows.

"Why so pensive?"

It was the Jewess who asked the question of Laura.

"Because there is nothing else to do, I suppose. I cannot study on the train to-day; I can't follow the others in playing cards. I guess our early call and the awful meal at that counter threw me out of balance. I haven't enough energy even to interest myself in the novel you recommended."

There was nothing about Omaha to arouse her. The air was heavy and moist. The city seemed gloomy, forbidding. Unlike Kansas City, which tried in a rough, aggressive way to be urban, Omaha had not wholly divested itself of some aspects of a country

town. The wooden canopy, which extended to the end of the curbstone, where it was supported by two thin posts, was one of the several indicia of provincialism. Worse: the city showed symptoms of the most serious affliction that can be visited upon a western community, the disease of arrested development. Neglect, abandonment, stultification, already had appeared. The negligence was made personal to Laura at the theatre, where the stage door opened directly on a wide thoroughfare and permitted blasts of the chilly night air to sweep through the region behind the curtain. The dressing rooms were damp and had grimy walls which had not been whitewashed in years. In lieu of running water were basins with a lazy fluid, too vitiated for use.

After the performance of "The Charity Ball" the members removed their make-up with vaseline, the men muttering maledictions against a management which "hasn't even a janitor's decency of keeping a house clean." The women were disgusted; with Laura's disgust there came a haunting sense that her association was not conducive to the progress of histrionic talent, and that she would develop more readily in a first-class company. The small audience, too had a depressing effect upon her work. In a different sense it depressed Protony, who had a mind to cancel the return engagement, three weeks hence; but Freeman prevailed upon him to hold the date, when the manager was sure they would be rewarded by a larger audience.

For three weeks the Protony Dramatic Company played in Omaha's territory. Every stop was a one-night stand where the living was in various grades of discomfort and where the "theatre" varied from a miserable lodge hall to an auditorium of six hundred seats and one box. In one town the Company were compelled to perform ablutions in old lard cans; in another the partitions between the dressing rooms consisted of shabby canvas; in still another there was only one room, which was divided by a thin curtain; the men occupied one side, the women the other. And in all of those towns the players were stared at in the

streets as if they were strange apparitions—or freak animals. The more intelligent people looked askance at the actors, at the actresses they leered. Laura received coarse, brutal, illiterate letters designating meeting places after the performance. She thoughtlessly handed a particularly offensive one to Protony, who rent it testily: "Why bother me or yourself with such cheap vulgarities." Her reserve was not now entirely responsible for his abrupt manner and soured temper; a depleting treasury also had made a black streak. The houses had been light since leaving Kansas City. To the abominable inconvenience of the single performance was the serious matter of bad business. When he returned to Omaha Protony's reserve fund was exhausted.

He wired Fix for money, assuring him that the tour in the Northwest—in the Black Hills region—must prove profitable. A sum much smaller than Protony had expected was paid to him at the telegraph office and even this relief was poisoned by a grudging telegram: "Have wired all that I shall care to advance."

Protony hesitated. The country he was about to play was strange to him. He had never been there and knew it only from hearsay. But Freeman's urgency decided Protony—he would venture the tour.

CHAPTER XII.

CRASH!

Lincoln and North Platte, the first towns played, barely paid expenses. At Lincoln a woman wrote the review of "The Charity Ball" performance in the local paper, a critique of polished irony, suavely denunciatory, in which the authors Belasco and De Mille were felinely ridiculed. She praised Laura's work and Burton's but wondered why they devoted their admirable power upon such "counterfeit literature as had been put out by the New York firm of carpenters and joiners." Fortunately for its treasury the company was booked for one night only. A return to Omaha was made in time to connect with the train for the Black Hills country. Laura, not being in a conversational or studious mind, looked out of the window. The country though flat was not uninteresting; it was arboreal, with a black, rich soil. The people appeared to be industrious and provident. At the village stations there were no indolent farm hands lounging after the manner of their kind in the states farther South. Briskness and business characterized even the least important of depots. And then there was an air of satisfaction and contentment among the field workers here that contrasted with the dissatisfaction and discontent of the same class in her own state. Laura wondered if, after all, it were not better to live—

There was a crash, a lifting jolt, a tearing noise and piercing screams. Laura was thrown into the aisle on to her knees, then, except for the falling of broken glass there was silence. The train had suddenly stopped. Getting up she found her companions in every stage of demoralization, save Carr, whose head was

thrown back on the arm of a berth chair; her face absolutely bloodless. A voice—it was the guard's—called from the rear: "Anybody hurt in there?"

Burton answered: "No; a lady has fainted, that's all. What's the matter?"

"Train wrecked. Engine in pieces."

Rosenau came up with a tumbler of water and sprinkled Carr's face. Protony ran to Laura to inquire if she was hurt.

A hasty count found none injured. The porter shouted they could not step out—the door had been locked for a few minutes after the grinding shock.

Then some one shouted: "All right; get 'em out."

Laura was the first to touch ground. She ran to the group of people directly ahead and saw that the reptile-like monster which had carried them so swiftly from Omaha was decapitated—the head a seething mass of coal and iron. What had been, a few minutes before a dashing, crashing, volcanic, vitality rushing over the plains was heaped on the tracks in thousands of inanimate particles. The wheels, the smoke stack and part of the boiler were discernible under the tender and its contents, which, in turn, were partly covered by the first baggage car that had plunged on the fuming pile. The mail coach straddled the left rail; the fore wheels, after mangling a score of ties, were buried to the hub in the moist sandy soil. The other cars were intact and stood like stupid animals, sottishly indifferent to the carnage before them.

"Anybody killed?"

"No passengers, no; but I don't see the engineer or fireman." The fear proved correct. The incisive hissing of the steam ceased and the sharp sibilation was succeeded by choking, raucous tones that articulated: "Boys, for God's sake—for God's sake—get me out of here!"

Many hands quickly delved into the debris that once had been the cab of the locomotive, and brought into the open air two beings enveloped in overalls and blouses, torn and black. The crowd drew nearer, reverentially—with the reverence due the dead. One of

the bodies, however, was animate. It uttered: "Don't touch my left leg, boys; the pain is horrible there." He was carefully carried to a hillock and as he was lowered to the blanket, spread on the grass by the Pullman porter, he pleaded: "Send for the doctor and pay no more attention to me. Look for Cook. He must be buried in there."

The conductor was bending over the other body. "That's Cook, the engineer. Here (appealing to Belleville) take hold of his legs and we'll put him alongside the fireman."

Belleville put his hands under the limbs of the still body. A patch of sooted blood soaked the blue jeans and under garment at the left knee; a crimsoned, sprawling blotch, a few inches below the hip, reddened the other member. As Belleville rose, a bleeding, shattered leg, scabby and fissured, dropped to the ground. Belleville whitened and his arms weakened.

"This is too much for me; some one with more nerve help," he murmured.

Except the brakeman, all had turned away, thoroughly horrified. With an expression of calloused contempt the railway employe muttered: "Weak fools." He dragged the mass of limp, contused flesh across the crushed coal and twisted iron, and as he pulled the inert body up the acclivity the other limb, reddened from the shoe to the trouser pocket fell off and rolled to the ditch.

"Don't put him next the fireman!"

"What's the difference? The fireman's delirious, anyway."

"Oh, Annie, Annie, don't worry, Annie; I'm all right, Annie," moaned the head of the fireman protruding from the blanket as if to affirm what had been said about his deranged mind.

CHAPTER XIII.

POISONED BARBARISM.

The nerves of the members of the Protony Dramatic Company were too fine to endure the sight. From Protony to Freeman they all went back to their car, which, fortunately, was the last on the train. Freeman explained that this was the stock season, when freight was very heavy and cattle and goods cars crowded the road. There had been running, about half an hour ahead of the passenger, a long train which ended in a flat car loaded with a huge iron oil pipe. This had fallen from the car across the tracks, unknown to the freight crew. The engineer of the passenger train could not see the monstrous obstacle until he had turned the curve and then it was too late even to lessen the speed, for the train was running down grade.

The sun was low when the wreckage was removed and another engine attached. Just before starting Laura heard that the fireman was dead. Both he and his companion were only recently married—their wives had bade them good-by at the depot. The sleep of the Protony Dramatic Company was fitful and feverish that night. The scene they had witnessed—or, more correctly, in which they took part—had shocked them to the marrow, making peaceful rest impossible. In consequence, they were the less fit to endure the enervating journey over the vast waste to the South Dakota line. The sun mercilessly glowed from a sky destitute of a mitigating cloud and stilled the air absolutely. The artificial wind created by the train's velocity added to the misery of the travellers; it aroused on either side of the track the sand, which darted in the windows, filling ears, eyes and throats.

For hour upon hour there was not a hill to relieve the awful monotony of the flat arid earth; not a tree to rest the eye. At long intervals the train momentarily halted at an Indian reservation, consisting of two rows of loose hutches, every one a cut-throat drinkery. Half the population was in front of or inside the saloon; the other half at the station; a motley crowd of Indians, indolent cowboys and liquor-besotted soldiers. Many of the Indians and cowboys were on horseback; nearly all young handsome fellows, especially the savages, whose large accipitral eyes vivified their dusky countenances.

These stops served only to emphasize the boundless wanness of the desert. The eternal, interminable desolation of sand drove the Company to cards, a game in which even Protony joined. Laura tried again and again to read, but concentration of thought or attention was impossible; the heat, the scenic desolation, engendered a vacuity of mind. She and her associates welcomed the night, which extinguished the scorching sun and rendered invisible the endless aridity.

In the morning they awoke in Paradise—Paradise in comparison with what they had seen in the last twenty-four hours. They were off the main line and detached from the overland train. The swirling movement of the one coach and engine made an echo in a canyon that was flanked by craggy mountains of red soil, gray ginting rocks and picturesque pine trees. They were moving in a light of gold—the morning sun filled the deep, narrow depth with a shower of golden sheen. The engine's joyous whistle echoed and re-echoed in this valley of natural magnificence. Everybody experienced a change of feeling.

"Why are these mountains called hills—the Black Hills," Laura asked the conductor.

"Because the first settlers out here were lazy,—too lazy to invent a fit name—so they simply translated the Indian equivalent for the place."

The canyon widened steadily; soon it broadened into a wide valley. In this valley was a resort for health and pleasure-seekers. A city of shops and hotels; a city of shopocracy. The buildings were new

and of bright stone. Many were pretentious. The company entered the largest of these, an elaborate hotel; an immense rotunda; a huge dining hall; big parlors; wide corridors; every room had an air of immensity. But the hotel was of the same crude newness that was stamped upon the city and its people. Withal there was an awkward ostentation, a garish display, a coarse pride in everything; though through all a patent solicitude about the ultimate success of the place, for visitors were not numerous; a readily noticeable fact that actually distressed Protony and Freeman, who saw that a light house was inevitable.

The audience that witnessed "The Charity Ball" numbered less than three hundred, made up mostly of men and boys. Disheartened, Protony confided to Freeman that he would cancel the remainder of these frontier engagements and return to Chicago, where he was sure he could get a theatre for a fortnight; in the meanwhile he would arrange for an Eastern tour. His company and his plays would not do for these interior western towns. Freeman urged that they play at least one more town, Deadwood, it was only a hundred miles distant and the prospects there were good.

At noon the next day the players were rehearsing in a barn-like building, in a blaring, glaring uncouth thoroughfare, of raw vulgarity, of savage levity. Laura saw that here was none of the homely, narrow contentedness of the towns farther east; here was barely repressed lawlessness of manner and speech. The most part of the men were of one class; outlaws called pioneers; Caucasian savages not amendable to civilization; Eastern failures—failures in trade and in the professions, embittered by their experience at home and brutalized by their present environments. Actual and potential criminals; fugitives from the laws of both coasts; cowboys—a rowdy crew of untamed or incorrigible youths from the East and of half-breeds from the West, many drunk and all armed; gamblers, with low, depraved, hang-dog faces. Lastly, the final dregs of humanity, the frontier bum; utterly lazy,

shiftless; shifty and treacherous; thievish in a small sneaking way; too cowardly for crimes that demand a show of bravery or energy; a leech of the lowest, the most revolting type; accessible to every depravity because devoid of all morality. The women of two kinds; the rigidly virtuous and the wholly immoral. The former all married, the latter all prostitutes. Both unwomanly, both uninstructed. The public class without a shade of shame; hopelessly degraded, thoroughly dissolute; lacking the veneer of decency, the gauze of reticence, the counterfeit effort at charm which is characteristic of most of these unfortunates in Eastern cities. Here they were bold, bald, brazen. Unsexed, they had the savage turpitude of desperadoes and the viciousness of wild cats and flaunted their abandonment with the vindictiveness of branded outcasts. Coming from rehearsal Laura and Rosenau passed open windows where these creatures sat, smoking black cigars, with whisky bottles at their side. Vile unnamable impurities were shouted at the actresses. Along this thoroughfare—the main artery of the town—nine of ten buildings were abandoned either to reverberant vulgarity or a shrieking immorality; saloons, gaming dens and stews, one after another. Some dives harbored the three; drunkards in the first story, gamblers in the second and harlots in the third. Placards announced the vices openly. The signs "Faro Upstairs" and "Poker" were repeated from door to door. From these drinkeries there was hurled nameless music pounded out by half-crazed, half-drunken bedevilled females—loose in attire and gestures. Rosenau was shocked, Laura sickened. So overcome were they by the unavoidable glimpses of these scenes that they did not at first get the full significance of the leers of loafers who stood in the doorway or sat on barrels and benches.

The Jewess remarked: "This, I suppose, is Western gallantry. I've heard a great deal of the bravery and chivalry of the West and I find that I don't like it."

Better, far better, Laura asserted, the repressed miseries, the veiled passions, the gloved, insidious temp-

tations and silent subtle sorrows of an Eastern city than this bare ribaldry, this naked bestiality, this poisoned barbarism, this outright butchery of civilization. From the theatre to the hotel it was a series of insults, by look, gesture and word. Those immoral barbarians saw no difference, made no distinction between women of the stage and women of the town.

Laura dreaded the performance, for Protony, pursuant to one of those grotesque ideas of the fitness of things which struck him occasionally, had billed "Sweet Lavender". The women of the company were secretly relieved as the curtain rose on an audience of men scattered sparsely among the staring chairs in the chill and uncanny auditorium; they had feared a huge and compact mob which would, figuratively, bring the theatre down upon the heads of the players. The few spectators were absolutely still until the last act, when some of them threw gold coins at the feet of Laura and Carr. Both were startled, but Burton whispered that it was a custom among frontiersmen to express their approval of an actress—who usually was of the music hall—by throwing money on the stage. "Don't fail to pick it up," he added. "You may need it for railroad fare."

The suggestion was timely, for everybody in the company knew that the almost empty house had again minimized the treasury. Between the first and second acts there was a hot discussion between Freeman and Protony. Freeman wanted to fill the company's engagements; he was sure luck would turn in a night or two; besides he was resourceful, he could manage to move along even if their cash became exhausted; he knew all the managers on the circuit—what was the use of having such acquaintances if they could not be used? His friends the managers would guarantee hotel bills and provide transportation until things changed for the better.

Protony was inclined to yield. He had decided to wire Chicago for a date and while there arrange for openings in the East. Burton's and Belleville's dissatisfied air—a whisper of defection—hardened Pro-

tony to his original purpose. On the way back, at Omaha, a telegram informed him that he could have a week at the Prairie Theatre—a down town house! The chagrin of defeat, the secret mortification of returning because of ill-success were assuaged by the gratification of a week's engagement at a first-class theatre in Chicago. With somewhat of a flourish he announced to the company: "Ladies and Gentlemen, we shall play at the Prairie Theatre in Chicago for a week." He smiled complacently at Laura, who had measured the distance between them more and more in the last fortnight. The parts of "Modern Love" were then distributed. The company would arrive next morning, Saturday, so that two rehearsals would be held before the performance. Protony telegraphed Robert Ringold that the German play would be put on and asked him to be present at the rehearsal.

"Where shall we stop?" asked Protony of Laura as they neared Chicago.

"I shall go to the Lake Side," she replied, with emphasis on the *I*, and then intentionally looked out of the window. This was a plain cut and his elation over the engagement at The Prairie melted; it entirely vanished when Ross greeted the company at the station and invited Laura, Rosenau and Carr to step into a carriage which would take them to his hotel.

"You seem to be well posted," Protony remarked in exasperation. "You always know when we come and go."

"I have very good friends around the theatres," was the cool reply.

Protony's infelicity was deepened when he reached the theatre, where he found Freeman in earnest argument with De Muth, the manager, who wanted a guaranty. De Muth insisted that the engagement was a "long chance"; aside from Burton the people were unknown, the play was untried in English; under the circumstances he could not turn his theatre over without some sort of a pledge. Freeman was about to take a conciliatory tone when it occurred to him that the manager had already spent some money in advertising the

attraction. He suddenly assumed an arbitrary manner; the Protony Dramatic Company had proved an unqualified success in Chicago; it could offer a good guaranty, but it never had done so and certainly would not do so now. If Mr. De Muth doubted the company's drawing power the engagement would be cancelled then and there. He rose as if to go. Protony, who did not catch Freeman's motive, interposed nervously; let the engagement go on for two or three nights, he pleaded; if the business was not satisfactory a guaranty would be given. De Muth quickly assented to the compromise.

"Unless you have money or can get it you are putting yourself in a dangerous position," remarked Freeman to Protony, in leaving the manager's office. Protony could see no danger and Freeman said nothing more in explanation.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COURSE OF TWO LIVES CHANGES.

"Protony has more nerve than I supposed," observed Ross.

"In what respect?" Laura asked.

"By not keeping his dates in the Northwest—which means that he will have those fellows against him in the future—and by coming back here in the deadest part of a dead season."

He offered himself as escort to and from the theatre. Laura would have accepted but for the idea that Protony, with his jealousy aroused, could not give his best to the production of "Modern Love". She found Protony and Robert Ringold on the stage a quarter of an hour before the time called for rehearsal. The journalist's earnest countenance relaxed to smiling amiability at sight of her. They shook hands warmly, she purposely pressing warmth to covert effusiveness pursuant to that instinct of coquetry which emboldens women, however modest, to fluster bashful men who find women inscrutable.

The company had memorized the lines on the road and, generally, had an intelligent conception of the respective characters. The rehearsal promised to be free from difficulties until Ringold from a seat in the auditorium interposed with suggestions that were revelations. Laura did not recognize her bashful friend. He was transformed. Once absorbed in the work on the stage he knew neither actor or actress. To him they were characters in a drama. He was earnestly insistent upon simplicity of tone and action. "Divest yourself of theatricality," he pleaded. "Forget that you are in a theatre; forget that you are actors. Be

Curran, the laborer; *Lizzie,* his daughter; be the recreant *Lorrin* for a couple of hours."

Laura satisfied him. Her brief but trying experiences with the world—with men, specially—permitted her to have a sympathetic appreciation of *Lizzie.* The vital truth of the final scene—the daring, vibrant lines—she carried with direct conviction that thrilled even at rehearsal.

"You read those lines as though you felt them, as though they had a personal application," murmured Carr maliciously.

"And you could feel nothing except envy and jealousy. Nothing but an advance agent could be personal to you."

The allusion made Carr burn. This was the first intimation she had that her relations with Freeman were suspected. She told him of Laura's retort and was consoled with: "Never mind, they'll all be out of an engagement before the end of the week—all but you. I've got something for you. The play will fail and I'll bet De Muth will close the theatre on Protony."

He spoke prophetically. The first night audience was small and was made up largely of journalists and "paper". Phelon, who had come up from West Baden—where he went in a collapse of nerves—applauded scene after scene. But he was quite alone in approving the play, during and after the performance. He wrote a full column of his finest prose in praise of the drama, of Ringold's skillful adaptation, of Laura's and Burton's appreciative interpretation. Other critics pronounced the thing a wild fling at originality, absurd in result. The second night—hot, atmosphereless—there were about fifty auditors; at the third, less than that. The next day at five o'clock De Muth sent for Protony; "You are running away behind. The receipts have not covered the cost of janitor service. Protony, you'll have to turn in five hundred dollars."

Protony was impregnated with what he supposed to be the artistic failure of "Modern Love"; the financial loss had not as yet given him much concern; he had not thought of De Muth at all. The manager's

reminder brought him to earth with something of a shock. Without a concrete idea of where he could get the money he promised to meet the demand "to-morrow."

"To-morrow won't do, Protony. If you don't pay in five hundred dollars by seven o'clock the curtain will not go up."

To Protony's perturbed mind all the gross power of the heavy, swarthy face—with its vulgar black eyes, vulgar nose, vulgar lips—and the big ponderous body seemed to give a physical substantiation to the threat. De Muth got up and went to the door, in sign that he had delivered his ultimatum. Protony, enfeebled, subjugated, could not but follow. Outside—in the air—he had a better command of himself. But the clearer brain gave no encouragement. To whom should he apply? He feverishly recalled his friends and acquaintances; he had many, but none was a likely lender; they were actors, journalists, former pupils—a barren field which would not yield a large loan.

At the end he thought of Fix; the very man—he hesitated. No; Fix had wired he would do nothing more; moreover, "The Millionaire" had not been billed at the Prairie. Yet—yet—yes, he would do it; he would take off "Modern Love" and put on "The Millionaire" for the rest of the engagement in consideration of the loan. He stepped into the writing room of an hotel, wrote a note to Fix, called for a messenger and waited. The reply came within a few minutes. It was laconic but decisive; the negative "No" was boldly written across his own missive. That was all; no address, no signature. The refusal, aggravated by its insulting manner, extinguished him. He renounced the shamed suggestion that had crossed and countered within him while he was awaiting Fix's answer to see Ross. A rebuff from that man—who inspired him with a strange commingled feeling of hate, jealousy, detestation—would mean lingering degradation.

As a final fling, he, in turn, resolved upon an ultimatum. Returning to the theatre he fronted De Muth with: "De Muth, you'll have to take chances with me

on this thing ["you'll have to" was given in an aggressive emphasis] ; I've thought the matter over and have decided not to borrow money. If agreeable to you we'll produce 'The Millionaire'. The change of bill may help us out. What do you say?"

The manager gave him a metallic look. When he opened his thick fleshy mouth it was to say: "Stay here a minute; you'll hear what I have to say." He called an office boy: "Tell Hoyt to come here." The boy dashed out and presently returned with a spare individual covered with overalls and a blouse that were flecked with varicolored paint—evidently the scenic artist. "Hoyt," fairly shouted De Muth, "make a big sign with the words 'Theatre closed for the rest of the week' and put it out on the sidewalk. We've struck the first frost since I've been here and you bet there'll not be another. Protony," turning to him, "it will take Hoyt about five minutes to make that sign. You'll have five minutes to put up five hundred dollars."

The fellow's brutal arbitrariness crushed Protony, who, in his disorganized state, appealed for mercy. "Mr. De Muth, I really tried to raise some money but could not. There are only three more nights; suppose we go on with some other play. But—but—if you must close your house at least shield me in some way—let me announce that Burton or Miss Darnby is too ill to act."

Protony had hardly spoken the last word when he saw that he had made a fatal mistake in pleading with the brute. De Muth's change of expression from what had been merely feigned sternness to genuine anger revealed that he had suspected Protony had some financial resource; but the confession convinced him to the contrary.

"Get out of here before I kick you out."

The notice was placarded by the time Protony reached the curbstone. He gazed at it in helpless humiliation. Two boys stopped to look at the sign. "Gee, I wonder what's the matter?" The remark arrested several passers-by. Presently the group facing the lobby

was so large that it prevented free circulation. It was necessary for a policeman's "Move on, gents!" to clear the sidewalk. The news of the closure reached the near-by saloons and restaurants; from here it floated to all the theatres and newspaper offices. The legend stared at Laura, who was accompanied by Rosenau, a block away.

"Come; we might as well go back," she said, pointing to the black letters on the white background. The Jewess' mouth was more expressive than were her eyes; the former trembled with surprise; the latter were void as she turned them on Laura in blank inquiry.

"Oh, Protony, Protony, I suppose. He has no business sense. He's placed us in a nice position. This will help our reputation."

The ironical prophecy seemed to be fulfilled by the way the press exploited the incident—*The Forum* excepted. Phelon, in a few lines, censured the house management. A column, with scare head lines, on the front page, told of the fiasco in the other papers. The unanimous reason chosen was "the repellent character of the play, which shocked the moral sense of the community." Burrows sententiously added: "Had a clean, wholesome drama like 'The Charity Ball' been given the theatre had not have been closed. As it is, the public has administered a just rebuke."

For two days Protony's courage was at a low ebb. He could face no one, so held to his room. The position at the hotel of Laura, Carr and Rosenau was disagreeable for a time. They were the recipients of condolences from the women guests, that were much more insufferable than had been broad stares and plain sneers. Assumptions of profound sympathy were pressed upon them, and this the next day, was followed by greetings of exaggerated politeness. One man was effective: Ross knocked at Laura's door the morning after the failure and stood in the doorway long enough to say: "If I can do anything for you I beg of you to command me. Don't worry."

The third day she got a long letter from Protony. He began by saying it was a critical time and that he

would put her to the test. He was much to blame for the differences that had existed between them, he acknowledged, but was she wholly blameless? However, there was no use in recalling the past. It were useless to remain in Chicago. After all, Chicago was a provincial town and the "West" had been well-named the "Rowdy West". Nothing would go out here except farce, melodrama or a tawdy play. In New York he was sure of finding appreciation. There—the real home of dramatic art—he would be understood. Above all, the East was the place for her. She was sure of winning fame in a Broadway theatre. He proposed, then, that they go together. He confessed that he had very little money left, yet he had enough for a few months of Bohemian existence—the amount would sustain them until he or she shall have found something to do. Would she go with him?

She held the note in her hand for some time—thinking. He had been much to her; he was now much less to her. Her augmenting indifference to him was due not so much to his failures as to his strictly personal defects—his weakness, his extreme selfishness. Still, she had been attached to him. And it was he who had rescued her from Darnby; he who had taught her all she knew of dramatic art, who had given her an opportunity. Besides, he undoubtedly was talented; he had the art instinct; he was refined, cultured. And—and—the natural, the ineradicable want —however talented—of woman—however strong of character—however worldly—of a male companion, a protector, indeed, inclined her to his proposal, provided —provided—yes, it must be. She must have a lawful standing with him; she must be his wife. Since her departure from Darnby, she had felt the tacit taunts, the impalpable jibes, the covert insinuations; heard the undertone innuendoes; perceived the invisible looks of superiority which women convey, not the less effectively because they are implied, to those whose social status deviates from rigid regularity; and the subtle, complex implications affected her keenly. Protony she knew thoroughly, and knowing him did not

fear him. He was of a fine mould, susceptible to certain influences.

Her answer was brief and pointed: "I will go with you as your wife, so that if poverty must be endured for at least a while, we may share it together, with respect for ourselves."

To him it was an unexpected reply. He had awaited it with feverish impatience, hope and fear alternating. Her note bewildered him. Calmed, his first impulse sent him to the writing desk to accept the proposal. He dipped the pen; but in thinking on what form of endearment the address should take, he hesitated. From this indecision his thoughts strayed to the deep importance of the reply he was about to write. He paused—and in that pause the course of two lives changed.

He began to analyze. After all, this was a very serious matter. His affection for her was prompted by absolute egoism and its quality was almost wholly physical; it was charged with a feverish admiration but was destitute of pure esteem. And—and—in every man of some thought and culture there is an ideal of morality for women as well as an ideal of a fair woman. This ideal proscribes sensuality; it is innocent of sensuousness even. It is associated with white purity. Later, as one breathes the world's vitiated atmosphere, the ideal is lost; but it returns at a critical moment, long enough to compel a comparison. The ideal visited Protony the second time—the first was the day following Laura's divorce. Since then? She was changed. She was of a stronger character, more worldly, her talent more developed. Morally? He did not know. He hardly suspected. He merely feared, a fear prompted by jealousy. No matter, the transient, and transcendant vision of what ought to be challenged a comparison. He was resolved upon No.

Furthermore,—here the ego revealed itself in all its cowardly selfishness—she might, after all, prove a burden professionally and otherwise. She was absolutely unknown in the East. There was always a

swarm of gifted actresses in New York seeking engagements. He recalled the ingenious and ingenuous petitions; the maneuvers and the subtle intrigues, the vicarious and the personal entreaties to get an audience with leading managers; young women and old, beautiful and unprepossessing, rich and poor; of social distinction, of notoriety, of humble origin; moral and immoral women of every possibility and impossibility —women without number who were burning to have a trial in New York. Decidedly she might be a burden; he certainly would not marry.

His reply was brief; he had changed his plans and would go alone.

CHAPTER XV.

EASTWARD HO!

Masculine insight and feminine instinct told Laura the reason. The same prescience promised her that he would regret his decision. The while, she was humiliated, for this was the second time he had rejected her. The first time her willingness was implied and his refusal tacit. Now she offered herself frankly and he refused pointedly. His answer gave her a very vivid and extremely realistic idea of what Shakespeare meant when he wrote of the woman scorned. Never before had she wished him harm; to-day she would like to torture him, to rankle his soul, to distress his mind excruciatingly. The spirit of retaliation consumed her. To disturb his existence effectively, to acquaint him once and for all of the impossibility to live without her she must—what? He would go to New York in a day or two. Then why not—a something confused; a nebulous hope, an undefined aspiration, a nameless timidity swirled around the central thought of reprisal. Yet if Protony could succeed there why not she?

She would go. Ross would lend her money—but, no; that wouldn't do. She must not go deeper into his obligations, although of late he had become as deferential in his manner as he had been bold and intrusive when she first came to the hotel. Why not Rebecca Rosenau? Perhaps the Jewess would go with her. Laura knew that Rebecca had a little money and could get more if necessary, for it had been confided to Laura that there was a brother somewhere in the Northwest who now and again sent money, a brother of whom Rebecca seemed fond and yet ashamed, who

was a mining camp follower selling miscellaneous merchandise at exorbitant prices.

"What a coincidence," Rebecca answered when Laura made known her intentions. "My very idea. I've been thinking of going to New Yerk since they shut the door on Protony."

They planned to go within the week. Laura being absolutely without means, Rebecca divided half her funds. The Jewess knew New York. She had seen in a theatrical paper—she was an omnivorous reader of professional periodicals—several addresses where on-the-road companies and players "at liberty" made their headquarters; not boarding houses exactly, but places where one could engage rooms at reasonable rates. She particularly had in mind Quincy's in Forty-second street. Would Laura go there? Certainly! Of course! Laura would agree to anything Rebecca suggested; indeed, she acknowledged that, entirely unacquainted with New York as she was, she depended upon Rebecca; "Then, you know, borrowers must not be choosers."

Rebecca dismissed the allusion to the obligation with a negative gesture; all that she asked of Laura was to be a true friend. She had been disillusioned in her friendship with Miss Carr. She wanted an enduring friend, a trustworthy chum. Sincere in the main, there was just a fine thread of calculation in Rebecca's proposal of fast friendship; she divined a future in Laura whose developing talent she had perceived quicker than Protony; she wished to be associated with a successful person, feeling rather than knowing that success and failure are inductive forces which influence their entourage.

When Ross heard, through the clerk whom Rosenau had notified, of Laura's intended departure, he immediately went to her. Wouldn't she remain a fortnight longer? By that time he would have charge of the Waldborough Hotel in New York, for which negotiations were closed only yesterday. Some change in the management would be made between time; after that he would be happy indeed to accommodate her and

Miss Rosenau. It—she interrupted him with the inaccurate statement that they had already made their arrangements.

"Where?" he asked quickly.

She named "The Quincy," giving the address.

He seemed relieved—Laura did not exactly know why. He hoped she would meet with a big success. He would esteem it a privilege to be allowed to call, for he proposed spending much time in New York, at least until the hotel he had leased was fairly established according to his plan.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CITY OF THE RIALTO.

It was Rebecca's information that the country between Chicago and Albany was flat and unpicturesque, so Laura paid no heed to the fleeting panorama made by the eastward special upon which the Jewess had secured half fares for two, and devoted the hours to the French version of "Anna Karenina."

When the train moved out of the Albany station—slowly, almost imperceptibly, as if it were regretfully leaving an old friend—Rebecca looked up from the original of Freitag's "Soll und Haben" to observe: "I think you'll find it worth while from now on. We'll cross the Hudson in a minute."

The first sight of the stream gave Laura a thrill. The lifting sensation was not imparted by beauty of scenery—for the Hudson at Albany is neither picturesque nor majestic—but by the imagination of the observer which recalled the river's historic associations—associations legendary, literary, dramatic. Laura had a vision of her school days; that class book with its high colored selections from the history of the Revolutionary War—an excerpt relating to Benedict Arnold stood out—came back as she gazed with avidity at the sluggishly moving waters. She thought of the Dutch settlers who—the bridge was crossed. The river disappeared.

"Is that all?" she asked disappointedly.

"All? Why, we'll see it all the way to New York. There it is again!"

There was a recurrence of the rush of studious reminiscences instantly the sinuous stream reappeared.

How it glistened under the afternoon sun, between the rounded, undulating hills! Laura's memory harked back to Washington Irving, to the many romances with which the Hudson is interwoven. The train as it sped along the left bank seemed happy to be moving amid this beaming beauty of nature. The wheels as they turned swiftly alongside the waters clanked in amiable and confident intimacy with the country traversed. There was no need of caution. A half a century of familiarity, of friendship between the railway and the river permitted any degree of speed without incurring danger. Curves were made confidently, even merrily. "Don't be uneasy; I know it's all right. The river, the hills and I are old friends. We have known each other a long time. This is my country; I rejoice in it. I may run along here with impunity. Signals and folderols of that kind are not needed in these regions," the engine appeared to say.

West Point, on a hill's bosom, evoked a monument of martial heroes whose white marble had but one yellow blemish—Benedict Arnold.

There was a rift into a nightmare when "Sing Sing" was shouted in the coach. The name recalled a description of prison life she had read in a periodical issued from this penitentiary and written and published by convicts; the spot conjured up a damned procession of round, guilty heads—blue jaws, leaden eyes—carried by heavy shouldered machine-like bodies. The vision of expiating souls vanished when the train again dashed into the sunlight.

Now the summer homes, on the hill tops, became more numerous, more pretentious. And as the stream broadened, it flowed more swiftly. The cuts and tunnels increased in number and rockiness. A whisk around a curve and the river disappeared. The hills, smaller here, were as huge stones beset with habitations. A high, immense bridge was passed under; then another; then yet another. The houses became serried. The train slackened—its speed, its air of intimacy, of confidence, of conspicuousness was gone—it moved slowly deferentially, as something inconspicuous and

insignificant amid an immense vastness of important things. Streets well-ordered, clean—some quite white —flitted by. Of a sudden, there was darkness. The cars were plunged into night, and for what seemed to Laura an endless time rumbled in a Cimmerian world. Just as suddenly the train emerged from the black hole. For not many seconds there was complete light; then the semi-obscurity of a massive station, with a vitreous canopy obscured by the steam and smoke from countless, restive engines,—New York!

Laura apprehended a difference—perceived something new in her experience of cities—directly she stepped from the coach.

The luggage boy who carried her grip to the front of the depot was different. He was unfamiliarly polite and expressed his thanks with modulated respect when she gave him a coin, as a pupil to a woman teacher to whom he is partial. She noticed a difference in his pronunciation, which was even more marked in a lad, who at the exit cried "Joinal! Joinal! All about the East Side moida!"

Once on the curbstone the difference was epic. The first glance at the surroundings, the first breath of the air filled her with delight. The thoroughfares were clean, the atmosphere was pure, smokeless; the buildings stood out bold, untarnished. Laura felt a distinction in the very air of the city, which at once awed and quickened her emotions.

"You like it, don't you?" observed Rosenau, noting Laura's dazzled expression. She took a long breath and continued: "So do I—it is almost the perfection of civilization."

Almost! Surprise at the qualification shadowed itself on Laura's face.

"I've been abroad—I've been in Paris," the Jewess explained. "Look, isn't that a balm for outraged eyes?"

The rows of thick copses made graceful lines in the center of the street they were fronting. The green chains extended à pert de vue and made a reposeful

contrast to the urban quality of the broad, white-paved way.

The tramway for which they were waiting jingled up to the depot. Laura followed her companion into the unoccupied car, placed her bag on the seat and continued her observation from the window. At the top of a knoll Rebecca exclaimed in a tone betokening a sort of vicarious proprietorship: "And this is Fifth Avenue."

The horses were trotting rapidly, so that Laura had only a glimpse of the Avenue; but the apparitional view impressed her as a picture of an undulating, palatial vista; the hard, smooth, lustrous carriage way, fringed with stately electric light posts and back of these a kaleidoscope of crenelated edifices of every variety of opulent architecture; nabob's residences; clubs and hotels of imposing magnificence; churches of secular splendor.

Laura was not yet in the second thought of Fifth Avenue when Rebecca declaimed triumphantly: "And this is Broadway."

Broadway had announced itself without this notice. Narrow and serpentine, the street charged with humanity and traffic emitted a gamut of sounds which blended in what Laura thought was an unsuccessfully suppressed roar. Between the pavements was every manner of vehicles and between these were tram cars—narrowly spaced, though gliding swiftly—seemingly urged to speed by the clangs of gongs. On the trottoir, an endless stream of men and women, young and old, attractive and unprepossessing, silent yet active; nearly all well attired; all having the cachet of that urban sophistication which is revealed far more in appearance than in words. They made a somber border to the winding mass of uneven buildings with their high-colored, loudly appealing advertisements. From Broadway there was a slight slope and near the bottom Rosenau signaled the conductor to stop. Walking back half way from the corner they stopped midway in a block crammed with a church, inferior shops, a restaurant or two and mansions deteriorated to lodg-

ing and boarding houses. A tousled, red-haired Irish girl, with rolled-up sleeves, showing big ruddy arms and a slatternly dress pulled up at the left hip, disclosing heavy feet and thick ankles, said "Sure, yiss, this is Mrs. Quincy's. Cumm roight in!"

Going to the door indicated, on the right from the vestibule, in a room of bare-worn furniture and walls covered with photographs of theatrical people, was seated, reading the *New York Dramatic Reflector,* a short rotund woman, from whom, though on the unsafe side of forty, there had not yet been banished every trace of physical beauty. An immense growth of black, dishevelled hair, with gray threads about the temples, topped a round, rather heavy and good-humored countenance.

"Looking for rooms?" she asked briskly, without rising. "Sit down. You want them adjoining? For how long?"

Rebecca started to answer that their tenancy would be indefinite, when she was interrupted with:

"Oh, out of work. I see. Then I suppose you will take one room jointly until you get an engagement. Your name, please. I suppose you know I'm Mrs. Quincy."

In showing what she called her "apartments", Mrs. Quincy explained that she now had a lease on the houses on either side, the three having been accessible to each other by puncturing the walls. She had begun with one house, and then took the other two. "You would suppose that I would have all my rooms occupied in the silly season;" but, no, they were mostly unoccupied. The class of Artists—she pronounced it "Ahtists"—who came to her always found engagements in summer theatres at the sea shore or in the mountains. She had a few permanent lodgers, talented young men and women working hard for a wider recognition in stock companies. "This, I think, is about what you want."

She flung a door, as she swerved from her explanations, in a wide low room, with two windows that gazed upon a back yard to which a myriad of houses turned

their backs—a piebald spectacle of back stairs, back windows and loose linen in process of purification.

So soon as the young women had decided to abide by her recommendation, Mrs. Quincy, after naming ten dollars a week, stated baldly that under the circumstances of people being unknown to her it was customary to receive a week's rent in advance. Rebecca acquiesced instantly with "Assuredly; of course," and in giving the money inquired sweetly, "Were you ever in the profession, Mrs. Quincy?"

Just a bare twitch of disconcertedness betrayed itself upon the landlady's meaty face. She was quickly resolute, however, and answered frankly: "Yes, I was in vaudeville until I married Jack—Jack Quincy, who was a contractor. Things went against him in his last years and when he died I was too cut up to go back to variety—to vaudeville—so I set up in this business."

The frank acknowledgment of her past took the sting from Rosenau's thrust. Laura admired the woman's courage and honesty, and sincerely expressed her admiration. Mrs. Quincy immediately distinguished her preference by addressing Laura exclusively. She would do her best to help Laura to an engagement. She would suggest theatres and managers, adding: "If you want anything about the room, let me know."

The next morning Laura came first in the introductions; and in presenting the Jewess Mrs. Quincy deliberately mispronounced the name "Roseoff." They were introduced to two musicians; to a stage manager; to a young actor of subordinate roles at the Columbia Theatre; to three actresses of indefinite ages and definite physical development who were "at liberty" professionally; to a half dozen coryphées, all fleshly attractive, and to several male choristers. The coryphées and the choristers were working, Mrs. Quincy observed, at the Alcazar, where "The Peacock's Paradise" was running. Then she suggested that they take their meals at the French restaurant across the way—the prices were moderate and the service was excellent—that they insert a card in *The Dramatic Reflector* and

in *The Mimic World;* that they go to the Redburn and the Dowling agencies.

They acted on the recommendation at once by going to Henri's for breakfast. Once a dwelling for a staid New York family, the lower floor was given to what the sign told was a Cafe. Nothing had been changed architecturally. The basement was still divided into four rooms, now crowded with ordinary chairs and plain tables covered by cloths that were fairly white. Laura and her companion were told in English with a thick French coating that the dinner was table d'hôte, at fifty cents, breakfast and luncheon were "at the discretion of the ladies." Rebecca addressed the waiter in French, which immediately expanded him to easy amiability. Confidentially, les mademoiselles could have a light breakfast for barely nothing and luncheon for not much more. Les artistes were not particular about their early repasts—neither was monsieur le patron. He—the waiter—brought them coffee and rolls and eggs à la coque and the total charge for both les mademoiselles was forty cents, which Rebecca thought much more than nothing after all. "We must be economical until we get a job," she remarked gravely, and Laura assented.

They started for the hunt directly, though Laura forgot her mission when in the full swing of Broadway. Her senses were holden to the winding, undulating highway of sophisticated humanity. "This part of the city is known as 'The Tenderloin,'" Rebecca explained. Then she stopped at the door of a low, frail, many windowed and architecturally odd building whose front was lined with handsome, clean shaven men whom Laura recognized as of the profession. "And this is the office of the *New York Dramatic Reflector*, the actors' friend, philosopher and guide." Two advertisements were inserted: "Laura Darnby, leading lady, disengaged. Address *The Reflector.* Rebecca Rosenau, general utility, disengaged. Address *The Reflector.*"

Rebecca, with hereditary enterprise—fully aroused by the transaction with the advertising clerk—asked if Mr. Farnum could be seen. The well-groomed, com-

fortable-bodied editor was affable. He had heard of both the ladies through his Chicago correspondent, Bluff Hill, and he regretted that their season had ended untowardly—Laura thought this a considerate term for a sorry fact. His tone was encouraging; they soon would make a connection in New York. He would keep them in mind. They must not forget to command him in any way he could serve them. In his absence, Mr. Knoll—he introduced a diminutive, disappointed, assistant editor—would look to their interests.

On their way to the office of *The Mimic World* Laura looked closer at the clean shaven loiterers. They were not all young. Some had white hair, seared brows and the eye that tells of the most tragic thing in life —lost illusions. The second scrutiny also showed a sheen on the clothes that proceeds from long wear and much brushing. While the collars were immaculate, the cravats were broad and obviously inexpensive. Here and there a woman in a nondescript gown, dowdily worn, stood talking with the disillusioned-eyed men; women of lost youth, lost waists, fleshly, formless women with painted cheeks, wan eyes and thick, fat voices. They, too, were—or had been—of the profession. How do such people—the disillusioned, indigent actor and actress—live? What were their thoughts? What sort of an existence is it that watches for the crumbs which do not always fall from the table of the more prosperous? Watching with old age upon them! And, horror of horrors, they were creatures of some sensibility, some pride, some intelligence, some refinement, who could not endure poverty and degradation with the stolid, brutish indifference of the multitude. A feeling of mingled pity and dread seized Laura. She felt like taking Rebecca's arm as if to beseech protection from such a fate.

At the office of *The Mimic World* there plainly was less prosperity yet even more affability than at *The Dramatic Reflector*—and the affability had the air of familiarity. A larger card was inserted here, for the rates were cheaper by one-half. Back of the business office was the editorial room where they met Mr. Pear-

son, who instantly assured them, with give-and-take intimacy, that *The Mimic World* soon would replace *The Dramatic Reflector* in the affections of the profession. He had the assurance of Mansfield and Southern, of Jefferson and Crane, of Drew and Goodwin, of Adams and Marlowe and—he dropped his voice to a strictly confidential tone—of the Frohmans—Charles and Daniel, for Gustave meant nothing—that they would exert themselves to further the interests of *The Mimic World*. He would show Farnum how to run a dramatic paper; would put Farnum in a position where the receipts of Mrs. Farnum's tour would be drawn upon to meet the deficit of *The Reflector*. As he proceeded he became more heated. He emphasized portentious injuries to his rival with lurid oaths. Rebecca, ever ready to filch an advantage from a situation, glided one of her naïvely expressed but tactual expressions between the vituperative sentences: "Mr. Pearson, are the chances of getting an answer to a card in *The Mimic World* as good as in *The Reflector?* Your rates are so much cheaper, you know—that is why I ask?"

"Chances as good!" He ejaculated. "They are better, far better; and what is more, your correspondence through us will be with first-class people, not with the most numerous class in the business, the class of fools—the one-night-stand crew that uses *The Reflector*. Say"—this with sudden transition—"Did Farnum say anything about me?"

With a dart of malicious mendacity—provoked by the possibility that the prevarication might prove of some advantage to Laura and to herself—Rebecca rejoined that Mr. Farnum had advised them not to advertise in *The Mimic World*, for they would throw away their money.

With this Pearson forgot himself altogether and belched forth a volley of garish expletives that shocked even Rebecca. Why, *The Reflector* was notorious for its blackmailing methods. A member of the profession at all known who did not advertise in that wretched gutter rag was sure of being roasted. Why, that miserable insect which disgraces the name of journalism solicits

the photographs of actors, playwrights and managers, prints them and then deliberately demands a round sum for their publication. Its constant and prolonged abuse of poor Augustin Daly—some years ago—was due to Daly's refusal to be held up. And with all this the dirty sheet doesn't pay. Farnum has to keep his wife on the road to make a living for him. He offered the support of his miserable paper to the theatrical trust, but the Jews would have nothing to do with him; that's why he's always burning up the syndicate. He lies when he says that he's against the combination because he wants to protect the actor. But they would see; the profession wouldn't stand such a blackmailer much longer; they would see, too, that they could get a good engagement through *The Mimic World.*

"I believe that man will get us something," said Rebecca, as they turned in the direction of the Redburn agency.

In the airy sweep of an upper square they found the intermediary between worker and managements. He filled every possible want of managers; furnished all grades of histrionic talent; had translators of plays from the French and German and from the Spanish; provided original dramas; had the addresses of stage managers, carpenters and an army of supernumeraries. Redburn had one assistant in his bare and exiguous office—a thin, faded typewriter with pale, sad blue eyes. He took their names and promised that they should soon hear from him. The Dowling Agency, further down in a more commercial square, was a contrastingly bustling place. The winding suite of rooms was noisy with the rattle of tyewriters, with the talk of all sorts and conditions of theatrical people. Laura and Rebecca were accorded only a few minutes. A busy woman secretary interrogated them briskly, assured them they shortly would be sent for and wished them good day.

"Now, where?" asked the Jewess when the elevator had descended to the ground floor. "Back to our room?"

The question at first seemed incomprehensible to

Laura, who, being filled with the fervid desire to see New York in all its aspects and all at once, supposed that her companion shared the same prediliction, forgetting that the Jewess was a cosmopolitan who had seen and lived in many cities.

"Back to our room?" echoed Laura in astonishment. You forget that this is the first time I've been in New York. I want to see the city."

"And you forget, my dear, that we are nearly broke."

Laura had not thought of that. The spell of the new conditions had banished all thoughts of pecuniary necessities. Yet it seemed a cruel deprivation to be so near a long-cherished wish—that of seeing the ocean —and not attempt to gratify it.

"But I should like to see the Bay, Becky. Can't we get there by a street car?"

Rebecca lifted her hand in signal to the motorman to halt. "This car goes to the Battery, where you can see the Bay. Some other time—when we have a job —we'll pass the Hook or go to Manhattan."

They had been in the car two minutes when Rebecca pointed to a low square building that was almost obscured by the mass of new edifices. "That was A. T. Stewart's store."

Broadway was now narrower, the structures higher, the men more numerous and busier, the women fewer; retail stores gave way to huge wholesale establishments whose signs announced proprietorship in German names of oriental floweriness. "These are my people," remarked Rebecca with mock pride. Most of them came over as peddlers; now they own the town. The Jew is irrepressible; he's eternal—eternally getting the best of it except when the Jew is a Jewess and the Jewess an actress, and then it's a case of knowing where you get your next meal after you've had it."

Laura but half heard. Her senses were subject to the din and movement of a square in which a gray and ancient looking piece of architecture was set. "City Hall," Rebecca explained, "and that old little building to the right, which looks like a block of gray gran-

ite, is the once famous Astor House, the grandparent of the Waldorf-Astoria; it still is popular with people who believe the country was at its best half a century ago."

The tramway now seemed to have plunged into a canyon, so narrow appeared the street and so high were the buildings—twelve, sixteen, twenty and more stories—making a tortuous and torturing sky line.

"Why, what's this?"

The interrogation was drawn by the sight of a strip of street filled with men and boys dashing in every direction. They were all somber and desperately preoccupied.

"Wall Street," answered Rebecca, laconically. "Turn this way quick." Laura saw amid worn and decaying tombstones a dark solemn church whose gracefully thinning spire was a deliverance from the architectural monstrosities surrounding it. The sacrilegious incongruity of this reminiscence of the eighteenth century set in the seething commercialism of the twentieth startled Laura, as if she had seen an angel with uplifted finger at the head of the financial thoroughfare.

"Trinity Church," Rebecca interpreted. "I've never been able to tell whether it is blessing or cursing Wall Street."

From here the car descended an easy incline into a park-like square, bordered at the further end by mildly agitated pale green waters, which made a roughly round circle within the serrated shores.

"So this is the sea," mumured Laura, her emotions moved by the spectacle—the ships at anchor; the variegated craft coming and going; among them scowling, huge-mouthed ferries and those gamins of the river and the bay, the dirty, impudent tugs.

"Not the sea, exactly; rather a nook of the sea. The ocean comes out there at our left, between the break in that long strip. Some day, when you've made a big hit, you'll be able to cross it in swell style—go to Paris for your gowns."

"You'll be there before me," rejoined Laura in that low, self-communicative tone which connotes con-

viction. "And who are these?" she asked with wide transition, meaning the every variety of laborer lounging with hebetated sullenness on the rude benches of the common.

"Men who want to work but cannot find employment; men so long out of work that they despair of finding it and have degenerated into tramps; men who cannot work, who are sick or disabled, and pickpockets, thieves and hoodlums."

A few old women, wretchedly clad, were interspersed among the male outcasts, and the sight of them made Laura more miserable than the creatures once men, but now dissolved by idleness, sodden with drink, steeped in vice, eaten up by every social and physical malady. "Come, let us go back," she pleaded. "This makes me miserable."

In the return ride Laura thought the material and psychological aspects of Broadway exhaustless. Though from end to end the American was preponderant, it was a street of nations; a thoroughfare genuinely cosmopolitan, for every race was represented. With her mind dazzled by these kaleidoscopic views she ascended the steps of Mrs. Quincy's. When she was about to open the door Clarence Protony stepped out.

He bowed ceremoniously, she distantly, Rosenau conventionally. But it was all surface play. Laura could see that he was mentally staggered; she felt that the gratification of getting an unexpectedly prompt cue for retaliation must have been mirrored upon her countenance and so it was, although Protony was too nonplussed to notice it. Even Rosenau's conventional nod was assumed—she was almost as surprised as Laura and immediately suggested that they find a room elsewhere. She feared his proximity would disturb Laura, who protested. A change, Laura said, was not necessary, for as a vital entity he had passed out of her life.

She evinced no interest in him. At first they rarely met, he being lodged in the further house. But the fact of her presence soon affected him. He discovered that she was still in his nerves. He found himself

watching for her coming and going, unobserved, as he thought; but she frequently caught a glimpse of his eager face between the curtains of his window. She heard from Rebecca, who got it from the roomers, that he was making inquiries about her as to what she was doing and what her prospects were for getting an engagement. One day, when his nerves refused to be controlled, he made a confidant of Mrs. Quincy—told her all; how he had met Laura, what she had been to him. Women, however old, are said to be responsive to confidences of the heart. She singled out Laura for specific attention and soon retailed small things about her to Protony, who was told where she had been, who in the world of theatres she had met; was informed of her hopes, her expectations of an advantageous engagement. One evening—about a fortnight after he had confided in Mrs. Quincy—she told him in an undertone and with a contraction of concern about the eyes, for she clearly feared the effect of the news upon him, that Laura and Rebecca had engaged to join Roland Marshall's Company the next day at Washington.

This was true. The Dowling Agency had sent a messenger to the house that morning asking the ladies to hurry to the office, where they heard that Mr. Marshall had wired from the National Capital for a general utility and for a leading lady. "Mrs. Marshall," the agent explained, "has been doing the lead, but I understand she is soon to play the part of a mother in a realistic manner. Clara Doon has been doing the odd jobs for Marshall, but he's peppery and he's hard to please, so the inevitable row occurred. He wants two young women who don't know it all; who are plastic; who can fit themselves to his ideas, and I guess you'll answer his purpose. Don't oppose him in any way and remember that he's eccentric."

They found him extremely eccentric and Laura thought, after the first rehearsal, that his eccentricity proceeded chiefly from his affectation of eccentricity. Physically there was nothing eccentric about him; a strong, rubicund man, inclined to be stocky, charged with exhaustless vitality and fine energy. He was

prompt at the rehearsals of "A Romance of Madrid," in which he had made a reputation by lifting the subordinate role of an intriguing, dissolute Senator to that of a protagonist. When introduced by his business manager, he bowed to Laura and Rebecca carelessly, without offering his hand, leisurely walked up to the footlights and addressed the orchestra leader: "*Guten Tag, Herr Becker; hoffentlich geht die 'Don Juan' Ouvertuere besser heute Abend; es war ganz verfuscht gestern.*" Then turning to the bassonist, who was either a Swiss or a Frenchman: *"Bon jour, monsieur le Contrebassiste; il fait beau temps."* This caused an electric commotion among the musicians. They smiled ecstatically; lifted their heads in unison and to the same angle; all seemed supremely happy to be noticed by the great actor whose linguistic powers made him obviously self-satisfied—until he turned to go up stage, when he saw, flushed of face and breathing hard from extreme haste, a belated member of the company. Roland Marshall's face became shaded. He readjusted his monocle, riveted his eyes upon the panting actor, then deliberately strode up to him. After scrutinizing the confused member from head to foot and back again, Marshall broke the awed silence with: "Are-you-a-member-of-this-company?"

The words were drawled in distinct insolence. The young man's flush and confusion deepened under the supercilious affront. He answered in a barely audible tone: "Yes, sir, I am a member of your company, Mr. Marshall."

The humble manner and contrite air, instead of appeasing the great actor, seemingly were interpreted as an invitation to stamp further humiliation upon the already humiliated. The great actor drew back a step or two and surveyed his subject anew, this time with an assumption of insolent curiosity. A prolonged pause and then, drawlingly, the better to stress the insult: "Awh-awh-awh; you-you a member; awh-awh-indeed. I should not have thought it." Turning to the other members, who stood in stilted array in the background: "I am not sure, ladies and gentlemen,

but I am emboldened to venture that we now have this gentleman's permission to proceed with the rehearsal."

That gentleman was the lightning rod upon which all of Marshall's irascibility was deflected throughout the repetition. Marshall offered no suggestion to Laura, who played a première danseuse, or to Rebecca, who did a subordinate dancer; he scarcely noticed the new acquisitions. But he had incessant sneers and fleers for the unfortunate creature who had come late and who was become demoralized under the derisive nagging. "I say—what's your name—have you never been at a smart dinner? You have? Well, I'm astonished. One would not have thought it." Or: "What were you before you tried to become an actor? What? You were just from college? Well! Well! I should have guessed a cigar clerk."

Laura's mounting indignation at the man for his currish conduct was transformed into spell-bound admiration near the end of the rehearsal when he essayed the death by paralysis of the vice-ridden viveur. She had read and heard much of the scene, but was hardly prepared for its griping intensity. It was a banquet in the sumptuous apartment of the dissolute Spanish nobleman. The fête was set for midnight to meet the convenience of the ballerini who had been invited. The guests were of all ages but of two ranks only; the men of nobility, the women of the kind that sap the nobility—the demi-mondaines and actresses. A toast had been drunk to *Clara,* to *Rosa,* to *Anita,* to *Perdita;* the diners were warming to the glow of the festivity when a tall young man with a huge boutonnière, insolent grin and tone proposed: "Now one to our host, who must respond with a speech." "To our host, to old Juanny." The table shook under the thump of hands; knives rattled against plates; glasses clinked. The used-up rake lifted himself slowly from his chair, glass in hand. In a voice cracked by false thinking and living he spoke sentiments marvelously similar to those expressed by Phelon at the midnight dinner given at Tom Chandler's. The words "women, money, materialism" were recurrent; but he stopped in the mid-

dle of a sentence. He had again uttered the word "materialism." He seemed unable to proceed. The corners of his mouth were nervously drawn, his hands quivered. He made another effort—"materialism—materialism—materialism—" his face twitched convulsively; his body swayed, then suddenly turned rigid, wavered a moment and fell forward on the table. With the crash of the crockery were mingled feminine screams, cries of alarm from the men; while the orchestra, hidden in the foliaged balcony, continued to pour forth the sensuous strains of a Strauss waltz. One of the guests, a physician, lifted the black clothed body with its white, drawn face from the table and placed it on the floor. Solemnly he raised his hand and said: "Stop the music. The Senator is dead!"

The effect of Marshall's illustration of death was so abiding that Laura and Rebecca had no sense for the splendid avenue in which they found themselves after the rehearsal. Not until the hectic applause of the night audience was dispelled by eight hours of perfect repose did Laura have eyes for the white and wide spread capital which has its back turned upon the town in general and the White House in particular; for the glitteringly conspicuous library; for the foreign looking men, diplomatists, whose very walk bespoke something alien and who seemed to regard everything American with either disinterested cheerfulness or with half-amused interest; for the women who appeared steeped in officiality—their countenances high-chinned in the consciousness of possessed rank or wistfully drawn in the desire to gain something higher for a husband, a father, a brother or a son. Laura had a feeling that it was a place for those who strive for place, an outwardly calm city which inwardly suggested insincerity, uncertainty, unceasing apprehension; anxiety of those who fear for their positions, of those who want the positions—even social—of others; a city which covertly seethed with plans, schemes, intrigues—like an Egyptian pitcher of tamed vipers, each struggling to get its head above the others.

Laura's objective observations precluded her from

observing subjectively until after the second performance, which was given to a much smaller house than the first and which exasperated Marshall to the remark, just before the curtain rose: "I shall not permit my manager to make another engagement here. These people care nothing for art. They are all for social show, for jobs and for emoluments." She noticed that Washington, in contrast to other cities, was coolly incurious to the people of the theatre. Rebecca, as usual, was ready with an uncharitable explanation. She explained the difference on professional grounds. Washington was the national theatre, peopled with the nation's favorites—politicians and statesmen whose every act was applauded or hissed by an audience of millions. Washingtonians were always in the limelight's glare, where there was no room for an outsider.

None was so mortified as Marshall himself, as he drove down the avenue from the hotel to his private car the morning following the last night of the engagement. Entirely unnoticed, he reached the station in sullen mortification. In the presence of the company he instructed his manager to "never again make a date in this town. They are too busy showing off to come near me." Then Mrs. Marshall—who was assisted gently—a valet, a messenger and two servants entered a private coach. The troupe got in a public car directly ahead. Laura wondered why the porter stood guard at the door of the private car; Rebecca was prompt with a devination:

"He wants to be guarded against the common herd in this wagon."

"You've guessed it," supplemented the messenger boy, a strip of a lad with dancing brown eyes. "Mr. Marshall is very particular about the kind of people he meets away from the theatre. If ever you want to see him you must send him a note and ask if you may have so and so much of his time. He won't associate with his people, but he's always making social rules for them. He won't allow the men to go into saloons. He says that if they want to drink they can send for what they want from their apartments. He thinks saloons are vul-

gar places. He thinks its vulgar, too, for a lady to go about alone, so he's made a rule that no woman of his company must be seen without an escort. Another rule—"

The guard had crossed the vestibule and interrupting with: "Joe, you're wanted." The lad leapt from his seat and in a bolt was in the private car. He re-appeared almost instantly with the command: "Miss Darnby, Mr. Marshall wants to see you."

The porter saluted Laura ceremoniously, like a sentinel at a general's tent. In a vision of blue and gold decorations sat Marshall on an elevated seat. The dark trousers were lost between the Chinese slippers traced delicately in white and yellow and the Oriental smoking jacket in black and yellow. Thus, with his round head and smooth shaven face, he looked like a high-caste Chinaman in the front view. Beside him, in humble posture, was a large, black bundle not relieved but emphasized by a drawn, pale, concerned visage. Marshall introduced the black bundle hurriedly: "Gladys, this is Miss Darnby. Miss Darnby, my wife. I called you in, Miss Darnby, to go over the supper scene in 'A Romance of Madrid.' Your reading is not altogether satisfactory. It lacks dash and finish. *Clara* is more than a première danseuse; she is a clever, worldly-wise girl who knows that a dissolute millionaire is infatuated with her. You must show more spirit, not of a brazen but of a self-possessed sort. And then when you tell of the wreck in which your former companion, *Piquinta*, went down, you are not fully convincing. You see, *Piquinta* loved life; she was luxurious and sensuous and—here is the subtle point—she had been your rival before she had decided to make a tour of South America. You were rivals, which, with women, of course, means enemies. You must, in your recital, illustrate the peculiar tragedy of such a creature going down in an awful storm in mid-ocean and yet subtly convey the terribly sinful satisfaction which we all feel —I'm speaking frankly, you see—when a competitor disappears, however he may be removed. Now let us go over those lines."

Laura began: "Have you heard the news?" Why—"

"Stop," interrupted Marshall. "You speak as if you were frightened. You should eject into your tone something of the sublimial satisfaction I just mentioned. Try again, and put the exclamation 'Oh!' at the beginning. Now then, 'Oh, have you heard the news?" Laura recommenced. Marshall's countenance turned sullen; but he said nothing, so she continued to the last sentence: "Good God! think of a young and beautiful woman who loves life being hurled into the mad waters of the ocean on a black and stormy wintry night —into the freezing waves, with rain and snow coming down and with the crazed cries of men, women and children in your ears. Ugh! Ugh! May God preserve us!"

What was it that came over her as she spoke those words? Her face whitened in the ineffable tremor that seized her. In that moment of psychic phenomena—in a moment of wondrous mystery when the portals of the future are opened—she had a premonition of that awful tragedy which—

"How well you read the last lines, Miss Darnby" —it was Marshall's voice which turned her from Fate's vision. "Why don't you read the first with the same feeling and intelligence? Let us go back again. Step to the back of the car and come forward as though you came from the wings to the banquet table. Now—"

"Oh! Have you heard the news?"

"No, no! That won't do at all. Again—go back."

"Oh! Have you heard the news?"

"No, again go back."

"Oh! Have you heard the news?"

"For heaven's sake, Miss Darnby, can't you put some meaning into those lines? You repeat them like a frightened school girl. You know a little German don't you? Perhaps you know what *Schadenfreude* means. That is what I tried to think of—*Schadenfreude.* Put *Schadenfreude* in your reading. Now again!"

"Oh! Have you heard the news?"

Marshall rose, his face purple, and moved toward Laura. She drew back instinctively, while Mrs. Marshall, who had been silent to that moment, got to her feet in a haste that caused her pain and seized Marshall's arm. "Roland"—her voice was gently supplicative—come, be calm, be considerate. Miss Darnby is nervous. She will do better tomorrow."

"Tell her to go away. She is intolerable."

Laura hurried to the door and in an instant was beside Rebecca, to whom she told her experience. "The man is mad," was Rebecca's comment. Just before the train reached New York the messenger boy whispered to several members of the company that Marshall had decided to discharge his entire support and engage new people.

"Will he do it?" Rebecca asked.

"That depends; he will if he don't get over his fit before to-morrow morning."

He had not wholly recovered from his anger the next day, for at the rehearsal he dismissed out of hand three ballet girls—including the *Anita*—because they were in his way as he came *en scene*. Of Laura he took no notice whatever, passing the reading of her introductory lines without recognition.

CHAPTER XVII.

AGAIN THE INTRUDER.

That evening two surprises confronted Laura and Rebecca. Their dressing room being in the flies they had to cross the stage to reach it, and in crossing they found Carr going over the final business of *Anita*.

"You here," exclaimed Laura, involuntarily.

"Evidently," the ash-blonde responded icily, turning her back.

But they were in no mind to discuss Carr. It was to be their first appearance in New York, and, however obscured by the overwhelming talent of Marshall, the performance might mean much to them. Laura flung herself into the part of *Clara*. From first to last she threw off everything and lost herself in the character. Now and again she heard a burst of genteel approval which swelled into a hurricane at the death of the Senator. There were shouts of "Marshall!" "Marshall!" "Marshall!!!" The actor stepped forward and those behind could hear his remarks to the house. He thanked the audience for its loud appreciation of himself and his co-workers. He was glad to know there were at least a few Americans who approved of American art, who did not follow every theatrical fad—a fad that admired a French actress with her hysterical method, that adored an Italian with her neurotic realism, that made a lion—social and otherwise—of an Englishman who had attained to the lowest rank of a rank nobility by sycophancy incomprehensible to a free-born citizen of the United States. The audience was probably aware that he (Marshall) had a complete command of several languages. He could, if he wished, distinguish himself in France, in Germany, in Italy or

in England; but he preferred reserving his gifts and strength for his countrymen, who, he hoped, would appreciate his patriotism and his efforts to surpass at least the English theatre.

Amid thunderous approval the curtain lazily descended. Laura, who had been down stage near enough to hear the speech, returned to her room, where she found Rebecca.

"I've found out all about it—about Carr," explained the Jewess. "I made up with her during the waits. She's stopping at the Waldborough, the hotel Ross took in management here a week ago. She got in the company through Ross, who is a friend of the manager, and the manager is to be at the Waldborough during Marshall's engagement in New York. I can't understand why Ross goes out of his way for Carr. He never seemed to care for her."

"Did she speak of me?" Laura asked.

"No—yes. She said Ross asked her to inquire about you, so she wanted to know how you were getting on."

Woman's intermittent possession of the sixth sense —when passion or affection concerns them directly —suggested to Laura why Ross had gone out of his way for Carr, who considering that Rosenau had taken the conciliatory step, bowed to Laura at the stage door. Laura was about to return the salutation when her eye caught some one entering Marshall's carriage. She was not trustful of her view until he looked from the window; the some one was Protony. The supercilious expression in those eyes did not disconcert Rebecca as it did Laura. The little brunette made several calm conjectures. Perhaps Protony had been engaged to stage a new play or to revise an old one or to dramatize an idea of Marshall's.

One of Rebecca's surmises proved approximately correct. Mrs. Quincy told them that Protony had packed and gone to the Waldborough that morning at the invitation of Roland Marshall, with whom he would collaborate in a play. The subject, she understood, was the French Revolution, with Robespierre as the

central figure. Rebecca scented danger. She hinted to Laura it were best to be at least on friendly terms with Protony, who would necessarily have confidential relations with Marshall. Interpreting Laura's silence as consent she offered herself as an intermediary. Laura interrupted her sharply. No, no and evermore no! She would have nothing to do with him. He was small, mean, inconceivably selfish, grossly jealous. She had found him wanting at the most crucial time of her life. He had shown cowardice and weakness in every critical moment. Perhaps he had talent for stagecraft, but she knew that at bottom his extreme selfishness repelled everybody, especially a woman upon close acquaintance. No matter what his influence with Marshall, she would have nothing to do with him. Rosenau saw it were futile to dissuade Laura from her determination, so bade her good night. But whilst disrobing she saw a letter on the chiffonier addressed to her. It was an invitation from Ross to come to the Waldborough. Though written to her, Rosenau divined that it was intended for Laura, particularly as "This includes Miss Darnby. There will be no trouble about rates—they'll be low enough to meet your income."

"Don't put out the lights. I have something for you. Here." The paper was handed Laura, who, after a hurried perusal, returned it without comment.

"Well, what have you to say?"

"I have nothing to say. Good night."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOOTLIGHT FLASHES—AND DASHES.

Like all the lodgers of Mrs. Quincy's, Laura and Rebecca had asked that the newspapers be sent to their rooms early every Tuesday morning. Both were burning to read what the New York critics would write of their first appearance. This was Rebecca's thought on awakening. She jumped to the floor, unlocked the door and feverishly grasped a bundle of journals. Her movement aroused Laura, who demanded half of them. *The Tribunal* congratulated Mr. Marshall on his sumptuous revival of a genuine drama at a time when there was a dangerous tendency to degrade the theatre with so-called realistic plays. Mr. Marshall's Senator had deepened in conviction and broadened in authority—it would endure as one of the great creations of the American stage. The audience was affected to copious tears in the second act and at the death scene was absolutely transfixed. There were two noteworthy changes in the cast. A western lady, a Miss Darnby, essayed *Clara* unimpressively; her enunciation was distinctly of the West; her gestures far from rounded. She was young, however, and in time might assume some of the graces so essential to refined theatre-goers. *Anita,* an episodical role, was convincingly enacted by a Miss Rosenau.

The Current congratulated Mr. Marshall on the revival of the Spanish play. Mr. Marshall's Senator was so well-known that it were redundant to comment on his work. *Clara* was entrusted to a Western lady, a Miss Laura Darnby, who will doubtless conceive the role in all its possibilities with continued interpretation. Rosenau was not mentioned.

The Diary wondered that with so many new and popular novels yet undramatized Mr. Marshall should revert to his success of a past decade. The changes in the personnel of his company were not advantageous to the art of acting as it is understood in New York.

The Courier thought Mr. Marshall's career coursed more and more toward garish contradictions. None was more progressive in the actor's art; none more reactionary in the literature of the stage. With his matchless abilities, Mr. Marshall could give a really intellectual reading of Sudermann and Hauptmann, of Ibsen and Shaw; instead, he resorted to the tattered stock of romantic contrivances fit only for the past generation. His personal work was, of course, of superlative excellence and in a corresponding respect he displayed excellent judgment in the selection of his associates. Miss Darnby, for instance, revealed an original talent for modernity, absolutely free from the annoying conventions of the routinists of the boards. There were amendable crudities and these were quite forgotten in the high intelligence and fresh conception exhibited. Almost the same eulogy might be written of Miss Rosenau, albeit there was a marked difference in the talents of the ladies. Physically and temperamentally she was the Spanish dancer, *Anita.*

The Comet did not deem it worth while to resuscitate a well-buried play for the purpose of introducing a pair of Western actresses of mediocre ability—for surely Roland Marshall did not exhume "A Romance of Madrid" to astonish the Metropolis with his Senator, which was as over-familiar as Jefferson's "Rip."

The Sphere thought two prairie ladies with harsh accents a light penance to impose for the high privilege of again seeing Roland Marshall as the Spanish Senator.

"Does that exhaust the supply?" queried Laura scornfully.

"Oh, no; we have to run the gantlet of the evening papers besides the weekly periodicals."

"The main objection to us seems to be that we had

the bad taste not to be born somewhere east of Pittsburg."

"Yes; we have no right to exist on the stage because we are too long with our r's and too short with our a's."

"Well, we can soon remedy that; it will be easy to change our pronunciation to suit the ears of Broadway."

"And after we have done that it will be easy to change our birthplace."

"Certainly; for public purposes it's just as easy to be born in Boston or New York as in a small town near Kansas City. And, by the way, Becky, where did you come from? You've never told me."

"You could never guess. I was born in a village called Kaunitz, near Prague in Bohemia."

"Bohemia? Why where is—"

"Austria, Europe. I came over with my parents when I was seven."

"Where are they—your father and mother?"

"Dead. Died in Chicago. Unlike most Jews, my father left nothing—not even an insurance policy."

"He left you plenty of brains."

"Of what good are brains to a woman, especially to an actress? They are an impediment. I already know enough of the art—I mean of the profession—to know that brains lead you into too many mistakes. Instinct and intuition are far better in this business than intellect. Best of all is beauty; a superb sensuous sort of beauty. A stunning, commanding figure with superb hips and magnificent arms and a cool contralto voice. A few fine gowns will do the rest. Ah (sighing), I have none of these things. All I have are a terribly big ambition and some intelligence. You can't catch the public with such negative qualities—you couldn't, were you so disposed, catch even one man of the public worth the catching."

"You horrible little pessimist"—Laura laughed lightly as she leapt from the bed to the floor—"You'll leave us all behind. Some day we'll look up from the lower rung and find you at the top."

"On the top of a ridiculously big wreck, you mean."

Rebecca's cynical prophecy was fulfilled with unexpected celerity. The portent was a circular notification (typewritten) from Marshall requesting members of the company to carefully study Carlyle's "French Revolution". This notice came with the evening papers, so that little thought was given at the time to the order. Among the criticisms of the performance *The Mail* supposed it must be gratifying to those who set the player above the play to be favored with Mr. Marshall's exhibition of virtuosity; otherwise the revival of "A Romance of Madrid" had no meaning except that it introduced two potentially good actresses in Miss Darnby and Miss Rosenau.

The Express rejoiced that Marshall had returned to the muttons of the drama. "A Romance of Madrid" was a play in the genuine and not in the current acceptance of the term. It was regrettable, however, that the personnel of the company had not changed for the better. A Miss Darnby and a Miss Rosenau were acquisitions that did not demonstrate their desirability last evening.

The Financial Advertiser heard that a new play was preparing for Mr. Marshall. For the sake of Mr. Marshall's army of admirers and for the furtherance of the American theatre it was to be hoped that the prospective piece would be something more than a contrivance for the display of Mr. Marshall's mechanical mastery of the actor's art. Mr. Marshall's versatility was unusual; his mimicry wonderful, his knowledge of life as it is understood in the theatre complete. But to one who could see men better than pictures, who loved art for humanity's sake quite as well as for art's sake, who caught a glimpse of things that were below the superficialities, Mr. Marshall's power was irresistible. There was a genuine gift in Miss Darnby, whose personality drew the audience toward her. Miss Rosenau's temperamental qualities would in time make her work distinctive. Nature intended her for

the portrayal of dark Southern women of intense temperament.

The Planet dismissed the production in a colorless, non-committal paragraph. Marshall only was mentioned.

The Transcript approved of the play, of Marshall and of Miss Darnby in brief conventionality.

The Daily Intelligence said the audience was pleased with everything and everybody.

"Are we a success or are we a failure?" asked Laura musingly as the last paper slipped from her hand.

'We are both according to what we have just read. I hope we can make it decisive—make it decisively successful in "Robespierre".

"I wonder what parts we'll have?"

"That's easy. You'll be asked to play *Marie Antoinette* and I'll be told to be a crazy old hag, the leader of the mob of red, ragged and screaming female demons."

The next day a circular note, this time signed by Clarence Protony, informed Miss Darnby that probably she would be asked to study *Marie Antoinette* and Miss Rosenau *Germanie Boucheron*, a proletariate. For a week they read Carlyle assiduously. Laura had caught in her seminary days the oddities, as they are called, of the master; her re-reading was instructive and not difficult. She now appreciated the grandeur of the style, the sustained brilliancy of the diction. For a day or two Rebecca was exasperated. She could not grasp the elemental originality of this spiritual mind; —could not accustom herself to the mode of presentation of these grandly moral ideas. Several times she flung the book to the further end of the room, resolved to replace it with Guizot's history, or Thier's or Michelet's; but Laura persuaded her to persevere; she would surely be rewarded for this seemingly difficult introduction to the Sage.

One morning as Rebecca took up the volume and for the first time was unconscious of any singularity of rhetoric, a circular similar in form to the former

notification was delivered by the letter carrier. Through his secretary Mr. Marshall informed them that "Robespierre" was abandoned in favor of producing a dramatization of Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter." The members of Mr. Marshall's company would please study that work at once. An hour later Rebecca received a note from Protony requesting permission to call. She comprehended that the note was intended for Laura, who when she heard of the indirect advances for a reconciliation flatly declined. He had passed out of her life, she declared, and the bare possibility of a recurrence of the mental anguish experienced with Protony steeled the purpose not to see him. No; it was impossible—absolutely impossible. Of course, Rebecca could see him; could listen to what he had to say; she would absent herself meanwhile; but for her part she was absolutely out of it. Rebecca answered yes, that he might come in the afternoon.

When he came his hand grasp was moist and tremulous as one who is perturbed in mind and who, mutely, beseeches aid and consolation. Seated, he circled the room in a glance and then looked at Rebecca appealingly. She understood: "Laura—Miss Darnby—was called away—about an hour ago—she was sorry—"

She stopped. The cold dejection which usurped his feverish expectancy disturbed her in the stammering excuse. Manifestly he had suffered in the last few weeks; there had been an intense struggle between his pride and his passion before the latter had succeeded in persuading him to this attempt at a reconciliation. He gave way: "I'm miserable. I know that I've not treated Laura well. But I was ambitious. I did not want anything to stand in my way. I sacrificed everything in the hope of making a name in the theatre. But I find that the heart is more vital to man than art."

Always something of a poseur, the last sentence pleased him so that its discovery assuaged his distress for a moment. Then he turned to his experience with Marshall, and as he voided his bile he was the more relieved. God, what a man! It was impossible to get on with him. He was not of one mind for five con-

secutive minutes. First he wanted this and then he wanted the reverse. Marshall had sent for him to collaborate in a dramatization of "Robespierre". There was no collaboration about it. Marshall simply said what he wanted and Protony must do all the work. He was well on with "Robespierre" when Marshall had burst into his room one morning and ordered that the play be dropped, that the "Scarlet Letter" be dramatized. He (Marshall) was sure that *Arthur Dimmesdale* would add to his reputation far more than the French Revolutionist. Two days later he thought that Charles Reade's "What Will He Do With It?" would be the thing to put on. Then he came back to "The Scarlet Letter". The man was mad. That very day, an hour before leaving the hotel, Marshall had asked him what he thought of writing a play with Machiavelli as the central character. And so it went on from day to day, from hour to hour. Intense in his want of one thing one minute and just as intense in his want of the opposite the next. It was impossible to accomplish anything with such a vacillating, self-contradictory creature around you. And then his egotism was something phenomenal. There was nothing in the world, discovered or undiscovered, that in his imagination he could not do. He imagined he knew all the languages; in his mind he was a painter, sculptor, composer, architect and more than all, a writer. Oh, yes, indeed; there were no difficulties in literature for Roland Marshall; poetry, prose; plays—farce, comedy, tragedy,—novels; philosophical studies and essays on the drama—he was a master in all these departments. Temporarily relieved of his bitterness against Marshall, Protony tactfully and tentatively reconnoitered the subject of Laura. He put a few tentative questions. Rebecca answered evasively. As he became more direct Rebecca's hints grew broader. Finally he understood. The flush in his face told of the hurt to his pride and the color deepened as Rebecca's sympathy aroused itself by his manner. When he muttered "Good-by" the Jewess saw that he had a substitute for his rancor against Marshall.

"Laura," said her companion on the way to the theatre, "if you had seen Clarence you would have offered your hand—perhaps your lips."

"Never. My affection for him died some time ago and contempt soon took the place of respect. I had rather seen in him an open, a courageous brutality, than the weak, the cowardly, the vacillating refinement and selfishness of which he is full. I have come to the conclusion that I would rather be the mistress of one of those stock gamblers who pester me with notes than to be Protony's wife. I'd despise myself in trying to live with one whom I despise."

These communications from the auditors became more numerous as the engagement advanced; they were different from the letters of adolescent admirers she had received in some parts of the West, in University towns; here in New York the writers were young men and old, men-about-town and men of standing. Some of the letters were beseechingly prurient; some nonchalantly rakish; a few were formal in form and eased by an apologetic air—hoping that the unusual manner of extending a dinner invitation would be excused—these, every one, asked that a reply be sent to general delivery. Several were boldly libidinous; they seemed either to exhale something feverishly faunistic, or suggested the perfume of eros. One writer was persistent. His first lines were informal; he admired her as an actress; he hoped that some day they would meet and so on. This was written on an unstamped page. Then as he got no recognition and as he warmed to his object he disclosed his private and business identity by writing on the letter-head of a Wall Street firm of which—Laura saw by the signature—he was the senior. One afternoon Laura was told that there was a lady downstairs who wished to speak with her privately. She descended to the dingy little parlor, where she fronted a tall, loosely constructed woman of unguessable age—sallow, hard-featured and half-veiled.

The woman extended her hand cordially: "My

name is Mrs. Hopper; I am known as 'Hop' in the profession—have you heard of me?"

Laura admitted her ignorance.

Mrs. Hopper showed her relief. "I take a deep interest in the theatre—artistic and commercial. I haven't failed to attend a first-night in twenty years. I have a wide acquaintance among theatrical people, especially among the ladies to whom I make myself useful in many ways. I frequently assist them in making desirable engagements. If agreeable, I should like to have you for a friend." She paused for a reply.

Laura listened to her with rising wonder. Was the woman one of those harmless monomaniacs who have a craze for everything pertaining to the stage, who infest theatres and pester actors with their intense but miscellaneous attention? But this conclusion was vitiated by the woman's appearance—sharp, shrewd, with a shadow of depravity on the countenance. Laura could only murmur some platitude about being gratified to have prompted the approval of such a critical habitué of the theatre.

Mrs. Hopper pressed her motive; would Miss Darnby take dinner at Mrs. Hopper's some day this week—say Friday? She would meet at least one admirer there.

Indeed? And who was he—or she?

A Mr. J. C. Wilson, a wealthy broker.

Laura's comprehension was swift. She rose quickly and asked Mrs. Hopper to excuse her. Mrs. Hopper displayed no surprise at this change in manner; she no doubt was accustomed to a rapid change in treatment. She assumed an easy, unoffended deportment, wished Miss Darnby good day, and passed out with an air of having completed an errand satisfactorily. Laura, meeting Mrs. Quincy in the hall, asked her if she knew the Hopper woman. Personally, no; Mrs. Quincy, however, knew of her; she had called frequently to see lodgers; knew her "profession"—Mrs. Quincy threw a long sentence of meaning into

the word and then paused, looking at Laura inquiringly as if in doubt about something.

"Then why do you allow her to come here?"

The question settled Mrs. Quincy's doubt. She turned voluble. "What can I do? Some girls will, others will not. You know the profession. All kinds of theatrical people come and go here. I can't govern their morals. And then Hopper really makes business engagements for a few actresses. There is Maud Carp; it was through 'Hop' that Maud was put on the road as a star."

"Did Mrs. Hopper furnish the money?"

"I don't know what the arrangements were; but 'Hop' had much to do with it."

Laura found out the exact relations a few days later, when Mrs. Hopper again called. Word was sent up that though the caller had something important to say she would be very brief—would speak with Miss Darnby a few minutes only. Laura, encouraged by Rebecca's assent, went dowstairs. The woman was diffident in manner, as one who had committed an indiscretion and wished to make amends. She hoped that what she was about to say would be accepted in the spirit in which it was imparted. She had assisted many of the profession to higher positions. Wealthy men's motives were not always selfish, frequently they admired the talent and the person of an actress disinterestedly; they were happy to further them professionally. Now, she believed that Mr. Wilson—Laura started at the name, but "Hop" continued gently—was one of these. He made a fine offer. He would advance the money with which to star Miss Darnby—would have a play written for her, would engage a good company and would back the enterprise liberally. He sincerely admired Miss Darnby; he—

Laura vacated her chair abruptly. The feeling that welled up in her was new; it surprised and mystified her; it was devoid of indignation. Her moral nature was not offended. She was rather exasperated, exasperated at the unknown's persistency. She inter-

rupted "Hop" with a swish-like "No," and quit the room.

Mrs. Quincy was talking with Rebecca when Laura came back. With slowly cooling emotions Laura told of the latest overture. Mrs. Quincy listened attentively and at the conclusion remarked: "That's right; pay no attention to him, yet. Don't cheapen yourself. If he's dead gone on you he'll marry you. Many girls have caught rich men that way."

"Marry me? Where did you get the idea that I want to marry him?"

Then what did she want? What was she waiting for? Her lifelong association with the lower stratum of the stage had so blunted Mrs. Quincy's ethical sense that she could not understand Laura's total rejection of a man of money. To her understanding, the wealth possessed by a rich admirer should be extracted somehow and the most complete and efficacious mode was to marry him. Rebecca was silent; she said nothing until the light was turned off and they were retiring; then she murmured in a preoccupied tone: "So he offered to star you?"

For some time notes and letters were handed Laura by the door-keeper, but the graded diversion in their perusal was lost one day when a notice came from the theatre, signed by Marshall personally, that he had decided to put "Robespierre" on instead of a dramatized version of "The Scarlet Letter."

In the meanwhile Ross had frequently called. Laura always had excused herself but once. In that meeting he urged her and Rebecca to come to the Waldborough. He would make a rate commensurate with their income. Carr was there. The hotel had become the rendezvous of Chicago people; they would find it very agreeable. But when Laura answered "Yes, and Protony is there", he understood.

Protony now passed her in and about the theatre without recognition. Once she formally bowed to him but he did not respond—going by with a stiff, aloofish air slightly stressed by implication of reprisal. She felt that he had been affronted in an ultimate degree;

yet in all their quarrels and separations she had never before detected a retaliatory trait in him. She thought her observation must be at fault when it indicated resentment on his part—until rehearsals for "Robespierre" began. Laura and Rebecca both were letter perfect at the first call, when they found Protony in charge of the stage. The company was told that Mr. Marshall would not be present until the dress rehearsal. *Robespierre* in the interim would be done by Mr. Carruthers, a minor member.

Protony was calm and considerate with everybody but Laura. When he addressed her it was in a politely irritated tone. He required her to repeat lines, suggesting that her intonation was faulty. At the second rehearsal her bow displeased him; it was not sufficiently stately. "Miss Darnby"—he drawled the Darnby—"you do it as an indifferent actress, not as a queen."

Though calm outwardly the taunt stirred her; but she was ready with a retort: "Mr.—Mr. Um—what is— Oh, yes; Protony: Mr. Protony, *Marie Antoinette* was not a stately woman. If you don't know you ought to know that Marie Theresa was constantly upbraiding her daughter for being frivolous in manner and reckless in dress. Why, she returned a portrait of her daughter with these very words: 'I should have been happy to receive a portrait of the Queen of France, but as you have sent me the picture of an actress, I return it'."

The rebuke administered before the company paled him. He answered in a keyed voice that betrayed rising temper: "And if you don't know, Miss—Miss—Miss—Darnby, I will tell you that this play acts when Louis XVI, *Marie Antoinette's* husband, was deposed, acts when *Marie Antoinette's* life had turned to tragedy. The very act we are rehearsing is in a prison, notwithstanding the Queen is surrounded by people of the court—all political prisoners. *Marie Antoinette* had become a woman whose trials had dignified her.

"Then, sir, you are taking liberties with history. At no time during *Marie Antoinette's* prison life was

she surrounded by people of the court. At first she was with her children, the King and his sister. Finally she was alone. Better re-write your play. It is idiotic as it is."

She regretted the last sentence immediately she had uttered it, though she had wished for an inspiration which would hurt him. It struck square; it made him white and rigid. The company stopped astounded; even Rebecca was surprised at Laura's impertinence.

The first word came from Protony; they were uttered in a low tremulous tone: "Thank you, I shall convey your suggestion to Mr. Marshall."

Then he ordered the rehearsal to proceed. Laura went through her part mechanically, feeling as one who had committed an overt act to her own astonishment. Protony was deliberate the rest of the day. Laura had never seen him with that determined expression.

"I'm afraid you went too far to-day," said Rebecca on the way home. "You struck him deep."

"He exasperated me," was the laconic reply.

The third morning after she and Protony had exasperated each other she received her congé. Enclosed in the note from Marshall's manager was a checque calling in amount for the salary earned and a fortnight's advance. Her dismissal was briefly worded: "Your services have become unsatisfactory. I must ask you not to favor us with your presence at the theatre." She had expected this the morning after her tilt with Protony, but as nothing was said the second day the fear of discharge had been allayed. The peremptory expulsion, then, shocked her after all.

The same evening the newspapers announced that Miss Laura Darnby, having been dismissed for insubordination, her parts would be taken by Miss Caroline Carr, whose character, in turn, would be assumed by Felicia Royle, of Sol Smiles Runnels Company. When Rebecca read of the change she immediately advised Laura to apply for Felicia Royle's work. "Send a note to Runnels at once and then call on him tomorrow at noon."

Laura wrote that her separation from the Marshall

"Better re-write your play. It is idiotic."—Page 152.

Company was not due to insubordination; it was the result of an enmity between one of the authors of "Robespierre" and herself. A reply over an illegible signature came within an hour and with it the part of *Vinnie*, the Southern girl, in "A Lonely Valley," which she would please study this evening and come to rehearsal at ten o'clock the next day. Laura was still going over the lines when Rebecca returned from the theatre at midnight. She was charged with news, but vowed she would say nothing until Laura was well in her role. Anything, no matter how startling, from the Marshall Company would not disturb her, Laura insisted.

Very well, then. Carr was positively wretched as *Clara*. She had to be prompted right along; she didn't get a hand from the house; Marshall was in a dog's humor because Carr nearly wrecked the banquet scene by her nervousness. But the most interesting of all —here the Jewess looked at Laura intently—

"I saw Protony; or, rather he was waiting for me at the door of the dressing room." She stopped to note the effect of this, but as Laura looked unmoved, even unconcerned, she continued: "He was badly cut up, poor devil. He wanted to assure me in a breath that he had nothing to do with your dicharge. He said some one reported your row to Marshall. Marshall then sent for Protony, who had to tell him what you said. He tried to make light of the affair; tried to excuse you, but Marshall would not have it. He ordered the manager to discharge you. Do you believe that?"

"Yes. I know Protony so well that I believe he regretted the quarrel by the time he reached the hotel. And I believe that Carr told Marshall."

Before starting for the theatre a note came from Ross, again inviting her to make the Waldborough her home.

"He certainly knows of your doings," Rebecca observed.

"And I certainly know nothing of his."

In the manager's office she recognized the voice of

the man who greeted her and the face was not unfamiliar; but the bearing, the manner and the sartorial appearance were completely transformed. "Is it you, Mr. Freeman?"

" 'Tis I," was the reply, in mock theatricals. Then, naturally: "That is why you were engaged so promptly. I told Mr. Runnels that I knew your work, so he told me to send for you immediately. I've been with him a month."

He was not the Fred Freeman of the West, but Frederick S. Freeman, of New York, perfectly adapted to the new conditions; his clothes were almost elegant, with not a suspicion of extravagance in cut or color; the only ornament was a watch and that was inconspicuously worn in the trousers with a black fob. His deportment was subdued. The broad, aggressive smile had been exchanged for a countenance of quiet good nature and the perennial cigar had been extracted from his teeth.

While they waited for Runnels, Freeman told of his shifts and wanderings with chance companies organized in Chicago for a month, a week, a night even —for one performance to make a couple of hundred dollars in a county fair town. But now he was positioned. He had attained that which he had sought for years, the business head of an organization of high standing. And Mr. Runnels was perfection. Never any misunderstanding. Why he—"Here he comes."

The typical Yankee comedian, very tall, very thin and dyspeptic. A humorous mouth, and big clear eyes in a face that defied an estimate of age—he could be either thirty or sixty. In a low dry voice that hit the r's roughly, Laura was told that she would do. Then they went back, and following introductions to members of the company—only one of which, Byron, a handsome leading man, projected, Laura thought, from the ordinary shop line—the one hurried rehearsal necessary for Laura's co-operation in "Lonely Valley" began. It was a pitiably, commonplace dramatic concoction, but it gave Sol Smiles Runnels complete scope to play himself—a Yankee youth of raw manners, dry humor

and infinite invention. On the way back to Mrs. Quincy's it occurred to Laura that she could enliven her part by giving the Southern girl a Southern accent. A native of lower Missouri, she knew the South and its speech well; so she spent the afternoon in softening the consonants and accentuating the vowels of the lines. In the evening, after the first act, Byron complimented her warmly; it was an innovation; she had done something with a role that had always been a lay figure. The women of the cast, two old, one uncertain, one young, assumed an attitude so pronouncedly high chinned that Laura, at first doubtful of the sincerity of Byron's commendation, was now certain of the distinction of her work—until she met Runnels; he did not respond to her formal salutation, but turned aside with an air that was affectedly preoccupied. This confused her; perhaps the women were right; perhaps their disdain was really justified; perhaps her endeavor to give tone and blood to a wooden image was overleaping in its effect. And yet she was twice applauded in open scene.

No, she had not been mistaken; the morning papers dispelled all misgivings and confirmed all hopes. Though the notices were brief they were unanimously favorable; the critics with realistic convictions were emphatically eulogistic.

She passed the women of the company that evening with a superb sweep, her head stiffly poised, an attitude that was very much modified a moment later when she met Runnels. To her warm, full toned, "Good evening, Mr. Runnels," he returned an iron stare. There was no mistaking it this time; he was sheerly displeased. Like all sensitive, conscientious natures, she became self-accusative, sought for the cause of other people's displeasure in herself—in something that she had inadvertantly said or done. She thought of all manner of indiscretions she probably had committed. Was it the tacit tilt with the women? Had she provoked jealousy or fomented disharmony in the company? Stars and managers dislike a troublesome member and she perhaps had unwittingly become one. She

decided to explain to Runnels, to express her regrets to—no; she would say nothing to Runnels. Instead she would go to Freeman and let him explain. With her mind eased she played the Southern girl heart whole. The applause from the refined ripple of gloves in the parquet to the positive clap of bare hands in the gallery was frequent and swelling—applause whose emphasis seemed suggested by the favorable notices in the newspapers. After the one scene—in the last act—from which Runnels and Laura exit together, the actor was almost rude; he scowled and turned away brusquely. The thought that Freeman would soon define her position prevented an evaporation of her exuberant serenity even when he saluted her distantly as she met him going toward the stage door.

"Mr. Freeman, when and where could I see you tomorrow?"

"That's a coincidence. I wanted to see you. I'll call at the house sometime in the morning."

He came quite early—for a man of the theatre. He was told to come upstairs, where he found Laura donning a light waist and Rebecca combing her deep black hair. Neither he nor they were embarassed by the negligée appearance of the apartment and its occupants; it was as if he had entered a dressing room at the theatre. Without preliminaries she plunged into her worriment:

"It isn't my fault that Mr. Runnels was displeased. The women are jealous; they snubbed me and I resented it. Now Fred, I—"

"My dear girl, you are on the wrong tack. The jealousy of the women and your resentment of it have nothing to do with it. You alone are at fault."

"Well, what have I done?"

He paused as if hesitating between a choice of suggestions that would convey his answer implicitly, rather than explicitly. Finally: "When you rehearsed your part did anyone tell you to use a dialect?"

Rebecca, who was still busy at the mirror, turned, faced him fully, gave him a sharp look and then smiled knowingly as if she had detected the trouble. Laura

answered: "Why, no; but as *Vinnie* is a Southern girl I thought it quite in character to give her the soft intonation of the South. I thought it would make her more interesting."

He hesitated again, seeming to search for a phrase that would not be too compromising: "Laura"—his tone was low and intimate—"Mr. Runnels makes it a rule not to allow innovations without being consulted. The part has always been played in a plain sort of way, so you had better drop the dialect and not exert yourself too much. Mr. Runnels will do the heavy work himself. You understand what I mean."

She did not get his meaning completely; but Rebecca, whose smile broadened, understood.

Freeman, seeing that Rebecca had caught the situation, quickly changed the talk. He spoke of the company's route. After playing in New York a month longer they would play all the big towns directly west to San Francisco. From San Francisco they would go to Texas, then the Gulf cities and from Florida along the Atlantic Coast back to New York, where a new play would be produced. Carl Smith was writing the new piece; the locale was in Illinois, in Lincoln's early days, and Runnels would be a country lawyer who was in sympathy with Lincoln's ideas; he would be droll, heroic and sympathetic.

In a tone in which ingenious mockery was innocently infused Rebecca asked: Will it be a one-part play? Will there be other parts besides that of the Illinois attorney?"

He feigned to be dull to her sarcasm and responded cheerily that there would be several strong characters. The leading lady—Laura—would have an excellent part. He believed, indeed, that the drama required a larger company. Perhaps Miss Rosenau might be induced to join next season? This as he took his hat to leave.

But Rebecca would have a parting shot. It was unlikely. While Mr. Marshall was not the most amiable fellow in or out of the theatre, he allowed develop-

ment, was not small or cheap; was not envious of attention that a member of his company might attract.

Laura understood. To be sure of her understanding she asked directly that Freeman had gone: "So you believe Runnels is jealous of the notices I got?"

"To be sure. It is that and nothing else. He thinks your work belittles him just so much—and I think he is right. The man can't act. He's got enough Yankee humor in him to entertain an audience for about fifteen minutes. He's Yankee in everything he tries to do; a Yankee in classic comedy, a Yankee in farce melodrama. He ought to go back to where he came from, vaudeville."

Laura grew more indignant than Rebecca the longer she thought of the virtual command to suppress herself. For the first time she had been ordered not to do her best. And this suppression was to innure to the benefit of an inconceivable egotist, of a small, narrow and incompetent actor. It was a monstrous demand! It was unheard of! It was contemptible! She walked the floor, burning in anger. No! she would not submit! She would treat the order with contempt. From now on she would surpass herself, just to defy that Yankee.

As Laura's indignation waxed, Rebecca's waned. The Jewess became thoughtful. She had her eyes on the floor contemplatively until Laura was calmed by the resolve to do her utmost. Then Rebecca observed reflectively in a low voice: "If you don't do as he wants he may dismiss you."

To Rebecca's dismay this re-inflamed Laura. Very well, let him dismiss and be ——. The oath surprised Rebecca; it shocked Laura. But in her intensity she involuntarily uttered the smallest blasphemy of the many which had entered her ear since she became a player. The little word hushed Rebecca's intention to bring her friend to a compromising state.

Laura played her part in a defiant strain all week. The Southern enunciation was specialized. On Saturday, after the performance, she got a note—with a fortnight's salary enclosed—notifying her that her work

being unsatisfactory, the management was compelled to dispense with her services.

On Monday *The Diary* said: "Miss Darnby was compelled to disengage herself from the Runnels Company in consequence of the recurrence of the fatal malady with which she was afflicted whilst a member of the Marshall Company, namely, exaggerated self-esteem."

Two papers announced shortly and brutally that she had been discharged for the second time for insubordination. Other journals had only two lines in the column given to the gossip of the theatre. These read: "The *Vinnie* of the Lonely Valley, Miss Laura Darnby, has severed her relations with the Runnels Company."

The fling in *The Diary* stung Laura. Without consulting Rebecca, scarcely reflecting, she wrote a note to the editor protesting against the injustice of the irony. She explained the cause of her discharge, ending the explanation with: "I tried to make *Vinnie* the Southern girl as I understood her, and in trying to make her truthful I collided with Mr. Runnel's vanity."

The Diary published the protest with the curt comment: "Miss Darnby mistakes Mr. Runnel's vanity for her own phenomenal conceit and recusancy."

Rebecca, when she read the lines, stared at Laura. Her astonishment prevented speech for several minutes. She let the paper drop, walked to the window and stood there without seeing anything. She seemed to be trying to control or to extenuate something that possessed her. Finally she turned: "Laura, you've done some surprisingly indiscreet things lately, but in this you've gone about as far as the law allows."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are barring yourself from engagements; you are committing professional suicide. It is well enough to be talked about, to be written about —such things help when they do not conflict with managers. But you are making enemies amongst the very people upon whom you must depend for advancement. You will get the reputation of a kicker, which is even worse than having the reputation of a Jonah. No man-

ager will dare to engage you. I have not been in this profession very long, but I know that in order to get on a woman must make concessions, she must flatter and cajole people in authority; must twist and turn until she gets an absolutely strong foothold. Then she may do as she pleases. But what are we—you and I? We are nobodies as yet. We've got to take our medicine as it comes. But really, Laura, I didn't think you could lose your head so far as to write such a note, and of all the papers, to *The Diary*. Why, don't you know that the critic, Rob Roy, is hand in glove with the big men?

"What do you mean by the big men? Runnels manages his own company. Freeman is a hired man."

"Yes, but does Runnels own a theatre in New York? He couldn't play here without the consent of the owners, the big men, they who control the best theatres in New York, and what do stars or companies amount to if they cannot play in a popular house in New York from time to time? New York makes or breaks an actor or a play. Then you should never attempt to correct a newspaper until you are at the top. If I were accused of murder I shouldn't protest unless I were a star, and then I'd sue the publisher for advertising purposes."

"Well, I'm not important enough for the big men to pay any attention to me."

A fortnight later she was not so sure. A call at the office of the dramatic journals to change the reading of her card, a visit to the agencies to remind them that she was at liberty prompted the suspicion that she had incurred the displeasure of somebody high in authority. Mr. Farnum was polite, but his politeness had a nipping air. The other editor was impatiently laconic. Yes, yes, he would see that her card was changed, but she must excuse him, he was very busy. At the Brown Agency, Brown looked at her wonderingly for a moment. She was looking for an engagement? Oh, of course, he would see what he could do for her. Then he became absorbed in an apparently deep matter with his assistant. The other agent motioned Laura off-handedly to take a seat and continued

his conversation with an inflated and flabby, false-voiced and false-haired blonde whose business had evidently ended and who made ready to go several times but something always occurred to the agent just as she was about to rise; finally as Laura and the other woman showed signs of impatience, ingenuity to prolong the one-sided talk failed him. But for fully five minutes after he did not remember that Laura was present. A very important letter held him. Laura at last spoke up determinedly. Oh, yes, to be sure, to be sure. He was becoming wretchedly absent-minded. An engagement? Why, what was the matter with the Runnels Company? Laura told him, shortly, the cause of her discharge, though she felt that he knew the trouble. He affected surprise as she related her difficulty. Too bad; too bad. Runnels was a fine fellow; he had a fine company; one of the most popular actors in the country and what a money-maker. Too bad, too bad. Well, he would see what he could do. But he was very busy this afternoon. She would excuse him, wouldn't she?

Laura walked out with humiliation and indignation contending within her. At that moment she was very near accepting Ross' renewed invitation to come to the hotel. But no; Protony was there and Carr. This momentary weakness was not a moral relapse; it was more a wish to feel secure materially.

"Did you find anything, Laura?" Rebecca asked.

She answered shortly, "No."

The Jewess' quick perception told her that her companion was in no mood to exchange ideas that day, so Laura was not disturbed in her thoughts and vague plans. Amongst these was a recurrent wish to go home, impulsive desires that were as quickly extinguished by pride and cold reason. Her father had not yet written. The mother's letters had become distinctly infrequent as the daughter's correspondence became negligent. Had she been very successful in her profession—a success which had spread throughout the country—and were she correspondingly prosperous she would go home. But now—twice dismissed

—without an engagement—with very little money—Impossible! Her pride forbade it. But what could she do?

That question occupied her in increasing anxiety from day to day. No word came from the agencies. The dramatic papers contained nothing but out-of-town offers from third-rate managers of unknown responsibility. At every manifestation of never so tactful sympathy from Rebecca, Laura withdrew within herself the more. Besides the little Jewess soon had troubles of her own. "Robespierre" was finally produced. It proved an egregious failure and Marshall went down in the wreck. Not since he had left the concert stage, a young man with a pretty voice, had he been so criticised. Even the critics, who always had been friendly to Marshall's work, exposed the crass crudeness of the authors and the complete misconception of Robespierre by Marshall, who the *Courier* averred, gave the Revolutionist Napoleon's strut, Lamartine's face, Grammont's garments and delicacy of manner and a woman's tenderness; instead of making him "a poor sea-green atrabiliar formula of a man, without head, without heart, or any grace, gift or even vice beyond the common, if it were not vanity, astucity, diseased rigor (which some count strength) as of a cramp; meant by nature to be a Methodist parson of the structural sort; to doom men who depart from the written confession; to chop fruitless logic; to contend to suspect and ineffectually wrestle and wriggle; and on the whole to lose or to be nothing; who, the sport of wrecking winds, saw himself whirled aloft to command la première nation de l' universe and all men shouting long life to him; one of the most lamentable sea-green objects ever whirled aloft in that manner in any country to his own swift destruction and the world's long wonder."

Rebecca alone was saved, and in being rescued her prophecy, made weeks ago, that she would be found solitary on a wreckage heap, was fulfilled. The mob woman was exempted from the lava of disapprobation that poured upon the theatre. She was the single

gleaming truth that shone through the dark, laborious mass of impossibilities. Marshall, Rebecca said, was in a hyena's humor all week. She feared discharge, so savage was he with her that she should be an exception to the crushing fiasco. She slighted her work in the two last nights of the week, hoping thus to diminish the applause and mollify Marshall accordingly. When "A Romance of Old Madrid" was reproduced the following week she almost obliterated herself. Marshall then condescended to address her civilly. "To get ahead," Rebecca explained to Laura, "we must step aside occasionally to let the people who pay your board pass."

Despite her troubles Laura was curious to know how Protony took the failure.

"I don't know how he took it, but Marshall discharged him the next day. But, my dear," she added, "I've got good news for you and bad news for me—for both of us, I mean. I've got an engagement for you in New York, while our company leaves for the West. I see by your face that you are pleased and sorry at the same time; so am I!"

The opening was at the National Theatre in Sixth Avenue, a house with a stock company, whose repertoire commenced with Shakespeare and ended with plays popular in the early '70's. The manager, Edelstein, wanted a second lead and hearing that the failure of "Robespierre" had compelled Marshall to cancel the major part of his New York date, thought that some woman of the company, preferably Rosenau, would prefer playing in New York at the National to remaining with Marshall on the road. In declining the offer Rebecca recommended Laura and explained her companion's former difficulties.

Laura found the manager and his establishment charged with very recent prosperity. Edelstein was doing for himself and the drama what a Boston speculator in theatricals, Harold Savant, had done a year before and was still doing for himself and for music; getting rich by producing opera at a minimum price of admission. It was Edelstein's minutely wrought de-

duction that he could do with plays what Savant was doing with operas and after the same manner. The chief points of this manner were in selecting uncopyright works; in engaging a few competent players who were pressed for employment, men and women once popular, but whose popularity had been impaired by time's ravages, by scandal, by a hurried course of living. The others were actors admired in the interior who seized this opportunity to appear in the metropolis; actors stranded high and dry on the Rialto by the failure of a company or because of an uncompromising quarrel with a star or management; actors recruited from the most promising students of the schools of acting. The lesser points to success were in leasing a practically abandoned theatre at a deep concession, a theatre ill-starred and away from Broadway's magic; in giving two performances daily. It was the latter innovation which Laura soon found trying. By Saturday night she was undone and felt that she must have a day's rest; but Sunday was the day of large receipts, the manager's real bread winner. Rebecca, preparing to leave with the Marshall Company, was all encouragement. She buoyed her companion with the prospect of a week's rest, for a play was sure to be put on in whose cast Laura would have no place. As for being alone, that was only temporary, and a change of room didn't matter.

The Marshall organization would return soon; she had heard talk of Marshall building a theatre in New York where he could permanently remain.

They bade each other an affectionate good-bye—tearful on Laura's part. Rebecca once gone, an acute sense of loneliness overcame Laura in the small chamber with one window gazing upon the alley, to which she had been transferred. She then realized the worth of the little Jewess' companionship—of her incisive cleverness, her cautious energy, her diplomatic determination, her long-sighted advice. Never was she so much in need of a companion as now, for the work at the National Theatre had reduced her to that state of neurasthenia which makes fine-nerved women a dread

to themselves. The hours not spent at the theatre or in bed were not many, but these were become intolerable. She tried walking, tried reading, even resorted to the conversation of Mrs. Quincy and the servants, but these diversions were superficial. She was wrought to a condition of morbid intensity which kept her moving from one thing to another.

At the theatre there was no time for social acquaintance. Mrs. Burbridge, nearly sixty, large, inflated, terribly disillusionized by horrible matrimonial and bitter stage experiences, shared a dressing room with Laura. Mrs. Burbridge's roles always were long and she never appeared until the sixtieth minute and was the first to leave, donning her street costume hastily. It was merely "Good evening, my dear; good night, my dear." The others she saw in scene or in and out of the stage door. Her part in "A Celebrated Case," a harrowing French melodrama, ruthlessly drew on her vitality. The play was down for a fortnight and one afternoon in the middle of the second week she felt so exhausted that she decided to skimp the role for one performance that she might save herself for the evening. The consequence was faint, damning applause. After the curtain the stage manager looked at her with a wondering air. Edelstein came on, and although he said nothing, his manner showed displeasure. She went home mortified and dispirited. In the evening, to make amends, she summoned all her energy and distributed it through the five acts of the coarse, consuming play. At the end the call boy handed her a part with a typewritten circular. She was notified to be ready for rehearsal at nine o'clock Sunday morning. The drama was "The Two Orphans"—her role was *Louisa*—a racking, agonizing piece of carpentry by the builders of "A Celebrated Case."

Laura stiffened when she read the note. So she was to have no rest! Glancing over the part a wave of despair overcame her; it was even longer than the character she was doing. She dragged herslf to the car quite undone. Her limbs ached, her head ached—right above the nose there was a dull, blinding, insistent pain.

In her room she flung herself upon the bed without disrobing and wept for sheer nervousness. She sobbed to unconsciousness. It was twelve o'clock when Mrs. Quincy knocked to ask if Laura intended to go without her breakfast. Still half asleep Laura opened the door. Her first complete idea was of the new part and the dread thought aroused her. The gnawing torment above the nose had subsided but not disappeared. She seized the new role directly she was robed, and the nervous headache returned in full intensity. Soon she could scarce distinguish the letters on the page. She dropped the typewritten sheets and went across the way for breakfast. A bite or two of a roll, a sip of coffee and she stopped. She had no appetite. That pressing pain in the lower part of the brow reasserted itself. It became acute. Coming back she met Mrs. Quincy in the lower hall, who asked her what was the matter? "You are so white." In mingled feelings of despair and exasperation she cried: "I won't stand it; I can't stand it. It's an imposition, an outrage. And then she told her experience.

"Just send those fellows word—I'll send Maggie down with a note—that you are sick and can't play to-day and to-night. That'll teach them to give you a rest once in awhile."

Words to that effect were sent to Edelstein and the next day as Laura was about to start for the matinee performance, a messenger brought a note from Mr. Edelstein's secretary, saying that the management was sorry to hear of Miss Darnby's indisposition; but Miss Darnby must not permit the worry of involuntary defection to retard her convalescence, for the management would strive to give as many and as good performances as before, though they would not have Miss Darnby's invaluable collaboration. Miss Darnby, therefore, was advised not to make her appearance until she was positive that she could appear at least four consecutive weeks without complaint. The management suggested several months' rest; in fact, the longer Miss Darnby refrained from appearing at the National Theatre the better the management would be pleased. In

conclusion the management esteemed it a privilege to bestow a gift of a fortnight's salary on Miss Darnby.

The ironical, peremptory dismissal agitated Laura for a few minutes. Then came anger and indignation, followed by the hurting sense of mysterious persecution. It seemed clear to her that she had incurred the implacable ill will of some one whose influence was wide and thorough. Though her thoughts were absorbed by her part the two first days of her engagement, she now remembered that scattered and very brief notices were printed about her appearance at the National. True, this house was a secondary consideration with the reviewers. An assistant to the critic or a good reporter was told off to write a paragraph or two whenever the bill was changed, and this was tagged on to the more important reviews; but in her instance only two notices were given of her work at the National; these—very brief—were published by the journals that had bravely praised her performance with the Marshall Company.

Mrs. Quincy was more agitated than Laura herself, for had she not advised her lodger to take the course which had led to Laura's discharge? But she did everything to make amends. Laura need be in no haste to seek another engagement; Laura must regard Mrs. Quincy as a mother who would take care of her indefinitely, and so on; all of which did not check the ever-increasing anxiety on Laura's part. Neither did a note from Ross—two days later—comfort her; it was the inevitable invitation, phrased more urgently, to come to the Waldborough. Carr and Protony were gone and if she objected to anyone else his or her room would be asked for. She again thanked him but declined to accept. As she sealed the reply she wondered what had become of Protony. That evening, in looking over the Snippet items of the theatre in an afternoon paper her indifferent curiosity was satisfied; he was assisting in the staging of the extravaganza, "Oriental Nights," at the Victory Theatre.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TURBULENT REHEARSAL.

At the end of the week Laura was requested to call upon Mr. Bolton, the proprietor, director and manager of the Victory Theatre. The request at once suggested to her the relation between a prospective engagement and Protony. But she could not see herself in such a production. She had always supposed that extravaganza was merely synthetic for prize animal women obviously on exhibition, rococo costumes, garish scenery, heady music and an imbecile libretto. The theatre's exterior announced its character; the architecture gaudy and insolent, bastard byzantine, brazen in posture, impudent in contour and barbariously ornate. The ante-room to the manager's office was the beginning, inside, of a continuation of what was outside, though its gildings and furnishings were meant to be imposing, especially the full-length portrait—aggressively vulgar—of the manager. Many women—no men—were awaiting an audience with Mr. Bolton. It was clear that they nearly all were experienced chorus girls. A few youthful faces that had never been painted and powdered looked timid among the bold and set, hard-featured countenances. The boy in uniform at the door had just taken Laura's card when a well fed, rather handsome fellow, of a Jewish type, came out, his head high, his air important, as though he had just terminated negotiations of tremendous importance. His impressive bearing did not, however, impose upon half a dozen of the waiting women who surrounded him instantly, and Laura could hear such endearing appellations as "my dear" and "pet" pass between them. Finally the handsome fellow, as if to release himself

and inform everybody in the room at the same time, said in a loud voice: "It will be impossible for Mr. Bolton to see anybody for sometime. He is in conference with Monsieur De Bargy, of the Châtelet Théâtre of Paris."

He was mistaken. Hardly was the announcement made when another boy in uniform dashed out and called "Miss Darnby." None had noticed Laura, so when she rose all eyes darted at her—darts of surprise, of envy, of curiosity, but not of disdain. A mass of fat relieved by black side whiskers slowly got up from the chair in which it had been lolling; a very dicommoding proceeding that denoted consideration for his visitor.

"Miss Darnby, I am happy to see you." Be seated."

The voice also was fat, but the big bituminous eyes were alert and incisive as they appraised the caller. Mr. Bolton at once said that she had been recommended to him by Mr. Protony. Here he interjected a parenthesis: The production of the "Oriental Nights" would be the most expensive and elaborate in the history of American extravaganza. Then he straightway offered Laura the part of *Princess Chali*. He explained quickly that it was a costume role; the gowns to be worn were high in the neck and trailing; very rich, of course, but "complete." The character called for considerable dialogue and two solos, but it would not ask much action. "You can sing a bit, I presume"—Laura nodded assentingly—"but I was about to say if you can't we could soon manufacture a voice for you good enough for the music that Declaven has written. The work will be easy—this encouragingly—and there are no matinees except on Saturday—this was significantly emphasized. And that decided her even before she heard the salary of forty dollars a week. Bolton gave her a typewritten pamphlet with the notice that rehearsal's would begin Monday of next week—the day was Thursday.

As she crossed the waiting room the boy announced: "Mr. Bolton can see no more visitors to-day." A feeling of compassion shot through Laura in catching the shadow of disappointment that fell upon the faces of the wait-

ing women, and the painful commiseration was with her until she dismissed it resolutely in the evening, when she applied her thoughts to "*Princess Chali.*" She found the lines difficult to memorize. The words were simple, the sentences plain, but the book was destitute of sense, of coherence, of intelligence. The two musical numbers were equally senseless—jingles without point or meaning—and the score was an evil echo of everybody from Strauss to Offenbach. But she had plenty of time to coax the vaporous imbecilities into her head. She found at the first rehearsal that her part was less significant than even the typewritten copy indicated. Its insignificance was made apparent by the time and care devoted to the mounting and to the chorus. These were everything; the lines nothing. The latter began to be cut at the first rehearsal. "Protony, too much talk; slash it, slash it." Max Sigman, to whom Protony was an assitant, gave the orders. Protony took the various parts and ran a pencil across the pages. He displayed no energy or enthusiasm in the proceeding. He stood in a wing, occasionally interrupting the principals with a suggestion. With the drill and grouping of the chorus, with the marches and pictures, he had nothing to do. He corrected the reading of a line, the enunciation of a phrase, the pronunciation of a word—these players needed such corrections, particularly as to some words whose syllables they emphasized in defiance of cultivation and scholarship. The failure of "Robespierre," however, appeared not to have impaired his confidence or disturbed his poise. He was perfectly self-possessed, giving hints, from his secondary position, distantly and in a coldly dignified way as if he merely were an onlooker who had had experience in such things and had chanced in whilst the rehearsal was on, and had been invited by the management to make a few recommendations. But to Laura's intuitive eye he was not the passive person he looked. Back of his formal bow of greeting, when they met, she divined an emotion and throughout the four hours she was on the stage she felt rather than saw his furtive glances, especially when she stood beside him,

awaiting the excisions ordered in her copy; her fine observation caught the ebb and tide of his perturbation; his hand trembled a little and the "Thank you" —the erasure made—had a tremulous note. Twice he was about to say something, but the chorus, at a signal from Declaven, intoned one of the numbers of the score and hushed Protony's intentions.

After the third march came Laura's first song. She faced the composer, whose ribbon-counter countenance was supported by a long thick neck, through which there issued a cackling, Yankee voice. She sang the number to Declaven's satisfaction. He was easily satisfied. He did not mind a disparity in tone between the chorus and orchestra; a difference in tempo between these bodies gave his musical conscience no more concern than the absolutely unacknowledged loans which he made from French and German masters. After the rehearsal, on the way out, Laura heard a musician say to a companion, evidently discussing Declaven: "Venn he rob, vatt for he rob zo he vont not pe fount ouid? De vay to rob ees to rob zo goot dat you keel de feller vatt you rob. Dees feller youst take someding und run away mit it. Efrey potty fint him out dat vay."

Laura had heard only few opera bouffe compositions, but even to her the score rehearsed that day had a familiar ring. She recalled one air, with its delicate, graceful orchestration, which was tellingly reminiscent of an operetta heard in Chicago. But Declaven looked wholly unconscious of these conscious assimillations. He was genial, kindly, unpretentious. The next day—at the second rehearsal—he brought his wife—a tall, dignified lady with learned airs—on the stage and introduced her to Laura. He was, indeed, cordial with everyone—the easy, jovial manner of a man who has taken things easily, who has accepted success as he found it. Conversely, Harry Carpenter, the librettist, made difficulties. The ordinary, immobile face with its anaemic mustache and Indian nose would contract disagreeably whenever the empty words were delivered carelessly. There were many stops. At last,

in the second act of the third rehearsal, Max Sigman exploded: "Carpenter, this won't do. At this pace we'll be ready for the first performance about the year of the resurrection."

Carpenter reddened and retorted: "I should think you and your kind who are sometimes accused of crucifying *Him* would feel uncomfortable in thinking of the resurrection."

Max's heat instantly cooled. He lifted his Hebraic head and gave Carpenter a look of admiration through a pair of glistening spectacles. "Now that's good; it's better than anything you've got in your book, which, my dear boy, is hopelessly idiotic."

Carpenter turned from red to white. The insult, calmly uttered, made everybody mute—the hush that precedes a catastrophe. For several seconds Carpenter seemed too hard hit to utter a rejoinder. Then he stammered: "Idiot yourself, you cur!"

The smile on Sigman's face broadened and his air of pretended admiration deepened: "Good! Good! I always said you were a good actor—off the stage. When you were carrying a spear in a leg show in Chicago I said you'd make your mark some day in tragedy. And when I saw you holding Lawrence Barrett's robe in "Richelieu" I was sure you'd make a good farce comedian. You were always a fine contradiction. Why don't you drop this sort of work and write a tragedy?"

"I'll drop you in a few minutes, you impudent monkey."

"Yes? About the same time the public drops you?" This as Carpenter dropped the book on the table and was walking toward the manager's office. While he was still in hearing Sigman called: "Mr. Protony! Be so good as to take Mr. Carpenter's part. And as you go along try to make the lines less idiotic."

There was another scene within the scene when Protony suggested an elision of the lines that fell to the comedian, Charlie Rookshaw: "I won't have it," Rookshaw objected. "There's nothing in the part as it is. I'm the favorite in this company. The public wants

as much of me as it can get and I won't be cut out this way."

"But, my dear boy, the lines don't mean anything. They don't carry anything forward and there isn't a hand in it for you," Max explained. Rookshaw didn't care about that. He wanted the lines and wouldn't be done out of them. Max called Rookshaw mulish. Rookshaw retorted that he might be mulish but that he wasn't an East side junk man. Max stepped toward the comedian menacingly and ordered him off the stage. Protony interceded; there was no sense in two gentlemen forgetting themselves. Let them understand each other. Max, he could see from the stage manager's standpoint, was right in eliminating ineffective lines; yet Rookshaw, he could also understand, did not care to have his part curtailed. Why not compromise? Cut out the speech and let Rookshaw substitute something of his own, no matter what—some business or some gags of his own invention. For instance—

Here Bolton appeared. His jaw hung, his eyes were set. The company knew the meaning of that expression—there was a dead pause. Even Max's anger cooled at sight of the manager, who, before he spoke, was joined by Carpenter. He turned on Max and demanded an explanation. Max started to explain the necessity of brighter lines, of curtailments, but Carpenter and Rookshaw interrupted him simultaneously, and as they tried to vitiate his defense, he in turn interrupted them. Presently they were all talking together in keyed voices and this excited babble was re-enforced by titters and low laughter from the principals and the chorus. Bolton was mute for a few minuntes only. He struck Max's table, paced down front and shouted: "Shut up! Shut up, all of you! If there's another row like this I'll fine every one of you and shut up shop. Sigman, how long does this thing play?"

"Nearly four hours."

"Then cut it. Carpenter, we can't stay here every night until after twelve to listen to your dialogue."

"Well, what's the matter with cutting some of the music?"

"Oh, have a little sense. You might as well ask me to hide the shapes of some of these fine girls. You ought to know that in a show like this there's never too much leg or too much music. And you, Rookshaw, have no kick coming. You can throw in a few more gags. We've got to have three good waits of ten minutes each. The bar must have a chance to make some money."

The last exigency provoked a smile from Declaven; but Carpenter turned an unhealthy color. "I didn't know," he muttered, "that I was writing plays to suit the necessity of a gin mill."

The "gin mill" inflamed Bolton. He turned on Carpenter brutally: "Plays? Plays? You write plays? My God, man, who ever told you that you write plays? You spin out a few cheap lines about fairy tales that are as old as civilization. We could take these kindergarten stories and let the company fill in the specches themselves and the audience wouldn't care about or know the difference. People come here to hear the music, to see legs and to drink liquor. Say—turning to Max—don't waste any more time arguing about the book. Make all the cuts you want and that settles it."

There was another taunting titter which seemed to affect Carpenter more than Bolton's insults. "It isn't settled by any means. I give you notice that I withdraw my play and if you attempt to produce it I'll enjoin you." With this he started for the door.

"You can't enjoin a thing that doesn't exist. You've got nothing here. Declaven provides the music and I furnish the legs—there's nothing more."

Protony and Laura had at first listened to the dispute between Sigman and Carpenter with indifference, for they were not unfamiliar with such scenes, but they heard the exchange of insults between Carpenter and Bolton with amazement mingled with a feeling of decency grossly wounded. Both had experienced the acute disappointments and the gnaws of poverty which the stage sometimes inflicts; but not until to-day had

they felt a sense of absolute degradation in connection with the profession. Bolton's shameless and mercenary view of the theatre was as if he had forced his mistress to expose herself at a street corner for money. In their surprised indignation they glanced at one another and the one sympathized with the other's sensation of shame. With Laura, naturally, the feeling was keener and more pervading. On the way to Mrs. Quincy's she had thoughts of renouncing her part; she had an accusative sensation of fostering a shameless production, an impression which she imparted to the landlady, after describing the scenes at the rehearsal.

The ex-actress also was astonished—in an inverse manner. What! Give up an easy part because there had been a fight between author and manager! Why, how ridiculous! There was nothing the matter with the show itself. There was nothing wrong about a lot of pretty girls in tights—so long as their limbs were well formed. Anyhow, she—Laura—would wear a "straight" costume. And any theatre that attracted good women was all right. It was a bad habit—this in a low, insinuating tone—to quarrel with one's bread and butter.

Laura, knowing Mrs. Quincy as she did, accused herself of inexcusable futility in consulting with her on points of professional taste and delicacy. What was to be expected of a former vaudeville performer of the third class? True, she had seen nothing among the members of the company to make her squeamish. The girls were followed from the theatre, but that happened to actresses in the best of companies. She herself had been coarsely insulted in the Northwest and several times some one had trailed after her from the National. Analyzed closer, it was Bolton's loose idea of dramatic art that provoked the ignoble feeling.

Apparently Carpenter had less professional pride than Protony and a much lower view of the theatre than Laura, for he appeared the next day unruffled, as if nothing had happened. Everybody was cordial and the rehearsal began in perfect harmony. But discord broke out anew at the end of the first act and

increased in intensity as the rehearsal proceeded. The row again was between Sigman and Carpenter. Sigman was for more cuts; Carpenter protested vigorously. Bolton appeared and told Sigman to "slash away until you get this d— thing right."

"All right," returned Carpenter in burning dudgeon, as he took his coat to go, "but if this d— thing, as you elegantly term it, is roasted to the last turn it will not be my fault."

"If this d— thing, as I call it, is a go, it will not be because you've had a hand in it," retorted Bolton curtly.

CHAPTER XX.

A PATRON OF ART.

The anathematized extravaganza was proclaimed a success. The more serious reviewers of the theatre either sent a sub-editor or commended the production in easy, negligent phrases which meant that the performance was a good thing for that sort of thing—a thing of fleeting diversion. The weekly periodicals given to sports and kindred amusements were several degrees higher in enthusiasm than the dailies. There was one exception and this deviation from unanimity made a row the afternoon "The Spirit of Sport" came out.

"Pringle" (the press agent), "why in hell didn't you see Hammond?" Bolton interrogated shoutingly. "'The Spirit of Sport' hasn't even got our ad."

"Hammond wasn't in, but I thought I left a big ad with them," murmured the agent dejectedly, of a sudden conscious that he had overlooked that publication.

"Well, you've got another think coming. Go over right away. Tell Hammond we've made cuts and changes. That'll give him a chance to revise his views. Take half a dozen good seats with you."

From the moment he had detained two women at the entrance on the opening night (holding them on a pretext until a man entered, for it was his superstition that a dead-head or a woman first in the house on an opening night argued failure) until well into the week, Bolton was spreading sail to the favorable wind that invited a big pecuniary success. He advertised the press encomiums broadly; he sent tickets for well-placed seats to popular clubmen and talked-of rounders. In the piece itself he took out something here and put

in something there; a negro melody was interpolated with Declaven's cheerful assent; he suggested current gags and new business to the comedians; he replaced members of the female chorus whose manner and physical attraction had proved inconspicuous by women of aggressive and flamboyant beauty. His energy and resourcefulness elicited the wonder of Protony, who, at the end of the production week, came to Laura with the idea of making his astonishment the loop for a rapprochement:

"Bolton is an extraordinary fellow, after all, don't you think so?" He neither prefixed nor affixed Laura or Miss Laura or Miss Darnby.

"He is extraordinary in a certain sense." Her tone was cool, her manner caustic; she turned from him as she spoke. Protony was unfortunate in the time and the subject chosen for a tentative reconciliation. Bolton had only a few days before proposed to Laura another custome, a glittering gown beginning at the low line of the bosom; corset tight at the waist and with a wide rift starting at the hips, on either side. Beneath this open skirt nothing but a pair of pink fleshlings. She had peremptorily refused. He became persuasive. He reminded her that with the exception of Mrs. Clive, once the old woman of Daly's company, who now played a comic part and whose age and figure precluded fleshlings, all the "girls" were in tights. And the costume he proposed was a delicate compromise; it would add piquancy to the role without impairing her professional dignity. Why, all the stars who play "*Rosalind*" expose themselves far more than would the *Princess Chali*. He added a material consideration to his plea; he would make her salary fifty dollars. He concluded with a dose of what he considered subtle flattery; her person had captivated troops of men about town who had fairly demanded that she heighten their pleasure by according a less veiled view of her charms.

Although innately modest, Laura's experience of the world, especially of the theatrical world, had taught her

the difference between genuine modesty and false shame; her ready insight had told her that handsome women were the loadstone of the stage—valuable gems which the manager must display attractively. She recognized that Bolton's view was strictly one of business. Therefore, after mature deliberation, she herself proposed a compromise gown; open laterally, from the knee down displaying purple hose—this hue to escape conventionality, pink being too general. Bolton enumerated the anatomical concessions; bosom, arms, ankles, calves. Very well, he was content, but the salary would be forty-five dollars instead of the full fifty, offered for a more luxurious revelation.

It was a bizarre dress, a strange mingling of old Spanish and Byzantine; ink black with slight streaks of yellow, the relieving hue modulated by dark, clinging laces. The drapery, though it covered, did not conceal Laura's form. Her contours undulated visibly beneath the somber-colored but withal gay costume, so singularly in harmony with her brunette beauty. She presented a vivid contrast to the blond banality of the other women in their conventional crimson fleshlings, their automatic movements, their stilted gestures, their mechanical voices, their cattle-like gregariousness, their artistic imbecility. In a glance, it was manifest that Laura was physically, artistically, temperamentally different from all in the gorgeous though garish picture. Her increased saliency drew a large correspondence of a meretricious kind. They who had written before wrote again, some more humbly, others less flippantly, others again more importunately. Most all of the correspondence was infused with peculiar importunity. They implored an immediate audience. One fellow in a vein of laconic cynicism wrote: "Where? When? How much?" and boldly signed his name and address. Among the mass of scented letters was one from Ross. He congratulated her upon her—success he called it. In a postscript—which Laura perceived lucidly was really the purport of the communication—he asked: "Are you ever at home? I've called several times but never find you in—or, at least, Mrs.

Quincy says you are not there. Why live in such a barrack when you may have superior accommodations at one of my hotels at the same rate you pay on 42nd Street? Come, let us take care of you."

On another day, in the same conditions, the solicitation had tempted her—for the first time Ross had the tact to ask a monetary consideration. But coming in the same mail with the heap of amatory letters his invitation was confounded with the rest—she feared it contained an analagous motive.

She felt the difference in her professional position, once the communications were in a shredded pile in the basket. Whilst in other performances she had received a salacious letter now and again, the more part in the past contained pure and disinterested compliments, many from women. The difference was in deeper contrast a few days later when Mrs. Hopper appeared, —not at Mrs. Quincy's, but on the stage, during the performance. One-half of the people on the boards knew her either intimately or distantly. Those who had no personal acquaintance glanced at her with something like awe, especially the back line chorus girls whose physical flaws relegated them to the inconspicuous row. These put themselves in her view as she passed from wing to wing, vaguely hoping that she would condescend to look them over. Her gaze was not once focused upon any one of the indifferently formed girls, She exchanged a few familiar remarks with Bolton, was greeted cordially by the stage manager and nodded pleasantly to the male cast. But with the women she had various and incisive degrees of salutation. She bowed deeply and deferentially to Laura, who barely acknowledged the silently respectful greeting; one of two handsome girls she kissed, with the other she shook hands and made a remark that brought a laugh from both. She complimented several, smiled on some. With a few she spoke briefly and formally. Upon two she frowned, after uttering a high and dry "How do you do?" Three girls she cut decisively, refusing to pass the conventionalities of the day with them. At the drop of the last curtain many of the coryphées

lingered in the wings; and while talking they had glanced furtively toward Mrs. Hopper.

Mrs. Hopper was now occupied. To the chorister she had kissed she whispered a few sentences. The girl assented with a nod. Her companion was given a thin, narrow card. She looked at it and nodded. Mrs. Hopper then approached a figurante who stood, apparently waiting, near Laura. The woman said something in a very low tone. Laura heard the emphatic answer: "No, no; I will not."

There were certain of the ensemble with whom Mrs. Hopper did not speak, the more part of them were amongst the most attractive; but they were distinctive in their mien; more reserved, their countenances denoting something purposeful; and whilst avoiding Hopper, their stealthy glances at the woman's negotiations told of the ineffable revulsion which a virtuous woman feels when she is an involuntary witness of iniquitous negotiations. Laura perceived the repellency of these girls and instinctively joined them.

"Do you live at home?" she asked of the one nearest her.

"No. I live with Maude"—pointing to a slender, earnest-eyed creature—"she lives with her mother and youngest sister."

"Have most of them homes here?" Sweeping the detached group with her eye as indicative of her meaning.

"No; they room in pairs as a rule for the sake of economy. They nearly all are ambitious. They study hard; they read and go in for voice culture. We hope to do better some day."

"I wish you every success."

Never was Laura more sincere; the wish was given by a heart that felt it fervently at that moment. It was in her to embrace the young women who evaded pleasure—who were contemptuous of tempting importunities—to pursue a purpose. Compunction seared her in reflecting that she had compromised her professional position in making part of this extravaganza—she who had appeared with Marshall, with Runnels;

had played in the legitimate so successfully. She had taken a retrograde step, had placed herself on the champagne-supper plane where promiscuous invitations were fairly invited. It was nothing less than degrading—that was the word, degrading. But she was resolved to hold herself aloof; to emulate the aloofness of the virtuous group; to be in "Oriental Nights" without being of it socially.

As performance succeeded performance adhesion to the resolution became more difficult than she had thought possible. She perceived it was comparatively easy for a member of the chorus to hold herself, to be apart, particularly so if nature had not been lavish with the bestowal of physical charms. A mere indication of a reservation and she was ignored. With Laura's place in the cast and her beauty it was wholly different. She must return greetings and compliments with interest, for nothing is more dangerous to a superior or wounding to an inferior than for the former to slight the latter. And then some one had said some where,—at Mrs. Quincy's, in the theatre or around the theatre, she could not recall—"it's all right for a girl to be straight, but it isn't good business to let the town know it."

She could see that Bolton took that view of it. Not that he was a libertine. With the chance of the box office being the same he had preferred strict morality in his theatre; but as custom had made burlesque a synonym for latitudinous sociability the manager was partial to the members of his company who drew the largest number of rich loafers. He had thanked Laura for donning the costume she wore; but since then his manner had become a carefully adjusted gradation of reservation. Within a fortnight the low degree of temperature in which he enveloped himself whenever he saw her congealed his neck so that he could scarcely bow. He never spoke as he passed. She caught the cause, which was quite substantiated by an imp of a call boy—one of those precocious packages of humanity that catch every whisper, however inarticulate, around a theatre, that sound every secret though never so well

guarded—who derisively grinned the significant information one night as she awaited her cue: "Say, I hear they are going to bill you as *Sainte Chali* instead of *Princess Chali.*" Thereafter it was "*Sainte Chali*" with him. The by-name quickly gained currency. One of the ballet—a big, handsome creature—bold and brazen—presumably just from a champagne luncheon, accosted Laura in a tone of extravagant reverence: "Good evening, *Sainte Chali*, when were you canonized?"

Laura, inflamed, answered: "When were you taken from the stews?"

The other raised her hand as if to strike; but in the quick second reflection laughed derisively.

"How did that insulting reply pop into my head?" Laura asked herself when calmed. She did not know. It surprised her as much as her sudden loss of self-control. Probably a bit of the dirt thrown up from the eruptions which occurred frequently in the free and easy section of the ballet had lodged in her memory. The quick quarrels which were as speedily quelled; the familiarity between the sexes; the course jealousies, coarsely expressed; the craze for money; the bald adulations of the men who possessed it; the boast of the amount of bills of the dinners to which the choristers were invited; the low vanities displayed; the narrow selfishness, the sensuality and the self-centered talk had generally an inductive effect upon her. She never could find comfort in talking with Mrs. Quincy. Mrs. Quincy's ideas did not even border on the ethical. Her views were altogether of a circumspect and materialistic order. She continued to admonish Laura with: "Be careful not to cheapen yourself. Some day a rich man will want to marry you." Even Sigman took up "*Sainte Chali*". The sobriquet reached the office of a theatrical weekly and the following Thursday there was a long paragraph in its broad pages. The allusion was direct and unmistakable. Though the perfectly proportioned burlesquer—such was the intimation of the lines—had never made herself conspicuous in a legitimate way she had succeeded in making herself intrusive in

burlesque. She had made a striking innovation in the hip and ankle drama by the introduction of invincible chastity. As a reward for this innovation Bolton had sanctified her—he had promoted the princess of burlesque to the princess of virtue—*Sainte Chali.* The change was the more extraordinary in that the virtuous lady had not thought of distinguishing herself in such a model way when her opportunity was more fit and much larger, when she was a member of strictly dramatic companies where her distinction consisted of colorless interpretations of the author's ideas, of deep-hued insubordination of the manager's orders and of the exchange of vivid, social amenities with some gentleman (or gentleman) of sympathetic qualities. Despite a strenuous matrimonial career there are women who bring an astonishing quantity and a surprising quality of morality to the stage, which, however, was in danger of being impaired by an assistant stage manager whose devotion had not diminished by experiences in Chicago and by repeated repulsions in New York.

There were allusive sentences to an hotel proprietor, to a persistent Wall Street broker. The flaunting fling struck home. Not since the scandal-mongering paper in Chicago had referred to her divorce from Darnby had Laura been so affected. She was angered and humiliated, wounded,—depressed and bewildered by turns. The periodical came to her in the morning. Toward evening she was still so enervated that she had no heart to go to the theatre. But sheer pride and an admixture of woman's nervous energy and obstinacy urged her to be in her dressing room promptly. Directly she stepped out to go to the wings she was met by the call boy's shrill voice: "Good evening, Miss Sainte." The repetition of the flagrant impertinence, flung in her face by the impudent urchin, threw her out of self-control. She went headlong to Sigman. With flaming cheeks and uncertain tongue she complained. Sigman affected indignation. He remonstrated with the lad; but Laura even in her temper detected the mock tone in the remonstrance. To the boy the tacit sanction of his impudence was obvious.

He went away grinning and his grin was repeated, in varying shades, upon all faces save the studious chorus girls.

Laura struggled with herself throughout the evening, but her burning feeling, which was fed by an askant or persifiant glance from females of the cast, and by cynical smiles from some of the men, seemed uncontrollable. Next morning lingering anger was displaced by elation. The mail carrier brought her a long, narrow manila paper wrapper in which periodicals are enclosed. She ran her fingers through the covering listlessly. *The Dramatic Times* unfolded itself and displayed in the full length and breadth of the first page an attractive picture of Miss Darnby as *"Princess Chali"* of the "Oriental Nights" company. Laura's blood quickened as that of a girl who had been presented with a beautiful jewel. It was an admirable likeness which illustrated her winsome visage and attractive figure faithfully. Her gratification lowered a degree as she turned the pages and failed to find a biography. However, the shade of disappointment in the seeming omission passed quickly in the thought that the distinction of having her portrait in the *Dramatic Times* would bring envy to the members of the "Oriental Nights" company who had derided her recently.

Though the men and women of the theatre as a whole evidenced no recognition of having seen the weekly journal Laura's fine perception informed her that she was envied by some of the women. One woman's question somewhat spoiled her silent triumph; the thin and hard-featured Miss Cartout, asked in a sarcastic key: "How did you get it in? What did it cost you?"

Although Laura retorted quickly, "Much less than it cost you to get your wrinkles," she was taken back by the inquiry. She had met the editor twice only; and now that she thought of it, with her satisfaction cooled, she confessed to herself that she had done nothing to prompt the front-page consideration; knew nobody in journalism who admired her sufficiently to signal her for such a distinction.

The explanation came next day, and it was quite simple; the business office of the *Dramatic Times* presented a bill, by mail, for $50.00, "for insertion of picture." The letter's first effect on Laura was chagrined dismay; then contemptuous indignation, which brought the written effrontery into the refuse basket in a fling. She dismissed this species of petty, polite blackmail from her mind for three days, when it was again ushered into her thoughts by a second account marked at the top *duplicate* and at the bottom, "Please remit immediately." She turned the paper and wrote in answer: "I gave you no order to publish my picture. I owe you nothing." Her reply was posted in the morning. In the evening, half an hour before she started for the theatre, the chambermaid brought in a card: "P. S. Sheehan, Press Agent." Awaiting her in the parlor was an actor-like head upon a high, athletic figure. He stated frankly and at once that he conducted a bureau of publicity for actors. Several prominent members of New York companies were subscribers. He knew everybody connected with the theatrical department of the press and counted as a personal friend nearly every dramatic critic of distinction in the country. These gentlemen or their assistants were always willing to print paragraphs relating to his clients. Anecdotes of personal interest and biographical notes in the gossip column were far more effectual in a promotive sense than favorable criticisms. He solicited Laura's subscription. Before committing herself she told of her experience with the *Dramatic Times*—told what answer she had made. Sheehan's rich voice became a salvo of exclamation points. Good heavens! No! She should not have done that! Her course indeed proved that she needed some one to attend to her interests. Pay the amount by all means and at once. Such class papers could do her much good or much harm. If she did not meet the demand the *Dramatic Times* would remember her in an uncomplimentary way for months to come. She must allow him to extricate her from the difficulty. He would pay the bill at once by sending his own cheque—

he was always in funds. What were Sheehan's terms? Oh, they were not excessive—it was not necessary to speak of that now. His charges would be contingent upon the result of his services, which he was confident would prove valuable, his confidence being based upon what he had done for—here, in low, confidential tones he mentioned names of very high currency in the profession. Miss Darnby would please allow him to take charge of her affairs; he would vouch for results. If the outcome were not satisfactory, why the arrangement could be dissolved by either party at any time. He became more persuasive by illustrating the splendid chances of constantly increasing celebrity and the certainty of a larger income. Laura, persuaded by the plausibility of the scheme, consented.

She awaited eagerly what Sheehan had euphemistically termed results. Two evening papers of small circulation and slender reputation—obscure sheets whose very existence hung upon the patronage of corrupt politics—referred briefly to the "Brilliant work" of Miss Laura Darnby at the Victory. A morning mediocrity, of precarious existence, printed a duplicate of the *Dramatic Times'* picture. Beneath was a eulogistic record of Laura Darnby from her first appearance in New York. But in the journals of standing, of influence, not a line. On Saturday at noon, the girl-of-all-work brought up a roll; it contained a few weekly periodicals given to art affairs. All were more or less loquacious in praise of Miss Darnby, the fascinating feature of "Oriental Nights." *The Dramatic Times* was affectionately panegyric. In this journal Chicago was given as her birthplace. She had received her first dramatic instructions under the "protection" of Mrs. Gilbert, who had seen in the girl a "mine of talent." She had toured with a number of "high-class companies" before risking her New York debut, and when she finally appeared with Roland Marshall her "success was instantaneous." "Hard study and intensity of interest" in her profession had compelled Miss Darnby's medical adviser to "insist that she desist from work or play only light roles." Pursuant thereto

she consented to accept Manager Bolton's handsome offer to appear in the "Oriental Nights." In the reading Laura's sensation ranged from blank amazement to amusement. She wondered after scanning the last line what the *Dramatic Times* had said had its bill remained unpaid. Recognizing the venality of the article Laura forgot it by the time she reached the theatre, but Sigman brought it back by the leering expression on his face when he said in a falsified prophetic key: "Ah, Miss Darnby, you are coming on; splendid notices! Splendid!"

Laura, catching his intent: "Of course! Of course! How could it be otherwise with you as stage manager."

She was surprised, however, and no doubt was Sigman, the next day by a highly favorable notice of a half- column in the *Evening Wire.* Followed to its root, it was an obvious and a voluminous expression with no other inspiration than that found in an agency whose only scrutable influence was of a financial character. But the article was discreetly written. The tone was high—quite in keeping with the general attitude of the journal—and the praising phrases reserved; yet the effect of the criticism, which seemed to have a reconsideration of "Oriental Nights" as a basis but which had Laura for object, was one of discreet praise of *Princess Chali.* She believed Sheehan when he assured her that "it was a hard job getting that in," but was bewildered when he added, "but a great admirer of yours fixed it." He was smilingly reticent when she asked the name of her admirer: "Never mind; you may know him some day." And then he made a suggestion: It were better to leave Mrs. Quincy's for a good hotel in fashion. A first-class address is as necessary to one in New York as a correct suit or a handsome gown and markedly so for stage people who are forging on. Laura thought of Ross, of the importunities she had rejected, and then she realized that Mrs. Quincy's had become something of a home and Mrs. Quincy a confidante, not an intellectual nor indeed always perspicacious, yet a well-intentioned confidante; and the large room, once occupied

by two, had been placed at her disposal at a fair reduction in rent. Everything was comfortable. She was a favorite with the domestics—was popular with everybody, from the chambermaid to the restaurateur across the way. Finally, she considered the increased expense which such a change would entail. No, she would remain; though Sheehan's demonstration that she was sacrificing prestige appeared convincing.

Nevertheless, his promotive methods had made a radical change in her standing at the theatre. From Bolton down to the call-boy deference was now the attitude toward her. From impish, the call-boy had been transformed into a being who showed respect for her. Sigman's easy familiarity was lost in his manner of polite esteem. Bolton came to her dressing room and thanked her for the recognition she was conferring upon his theatre. Keen, he recognized in her one of the rare species of players upon whom a compliment may be bestowed without inflating their self-esteem and the inevitable sequence of such inflation—a larger share of the house's receipts. He was solicitous of her satisfaction with her role of *Princess Chali;* would she care to have the part amplified? Declaven would be happy to compose new numbers and add them to the character. Perhaps the lines were too few? She had only to express a wish and Carpenter would write more epigrams. If she considered her costume in the second act too revealing she had but to order a more modest gown. He was suave and consummately considerate; completely changed from the brutal mercenary animal that had shocked her at rehearsals. Though Laura estimated his intended homage at its true worth she, womanlike, was not displeased to work in an environment grown more congenial to her nerves. She thanked him; but no, everything was entirely satisfactory; even the cab which he thought she should have to and from the theatre was declined. She was satisfied to come and go with one of the choristers as usual.

The sudden serenity of her position was as suddenly clouded by a visit from Sheehan. She had quite

forgotten the law of compensation, but she was reminded of it with smooth tact by Sheehan: A banker who had done much for once obscure but now established actresses had become interested in her—in a thoroughly high sense to be sure. This gentleman had sent many talented girls abroad. Miss Arton and Miss Carton, Mary Mellony and Clara Carles and others of this and that opera company had been educated at the expense of the financier. He was a wholly unpretentious philanthropist and Sheehan did not exactly know what he wished to do for Laura, but he thought it was in the way of offering larger opportunities—possibly he would suggest an organization of her own.

"Do you know Mrs. Hopper?" interrupted Laura, significantly.

His surprise at the apparent irrelevancy of the question deceived her. No; he had never heard of her; if she were a patroness of art he had certainly known of her.

"Well, no, she is not that. But go on.

Well, that was all. It was a purely disinterested matter which she ought to consider. Please let him know and he would arrange to introduce her. She thought of it for an hour after he had gone. Then Mrs. Quincy was called in and consulted. It was, of course, possible that the unknown's notices were philanthropic, but the chance favored her own experiences in such cases. Still an introduction would do no harm, and it was barely likely it would be advantageous to her. Yes, meet him by all means; never throw a chance away. Wishing to free her mind of the doubtful matter she wrote Sheehan before going to the theatre, that she would be pleased to see his friend. It was Thursday afternoon when the letter was posted, but Sheehan's response was not received until Saturday at midday. The time for the introduction was set for the next day, Sunday. He would call about five o'clock and escort her to the Royalty, where his friend would await them. The day chosen—when there was no performance—the hour and the manner

of the rendezvous strengthened Laura's suspicion that Sheehan's calling was identical with that of Mrs. Hopper. Now that she had started she would abide by her course to the positive proof of Sheehan's suspected profession. He came in a carriage and his conversation and demeanor from the house to the luxurious hotel were irreproachable. In his talk of the theatre he deftly made known Strathmore's name, whom he extolled with fine taste, tact and skillful discrimination. He touched upon his wealth lightly; he spoke of his influence emphatically. He commended his appearance and charming manner, neither of which Laura was prepared to endorse when they were seated in the discreetly screened corner of the be-planted, be-fountained and be-pictured dining room. Sheehan excused himself and left her with a man who at the first glance, but only at the first, looked younger than she had pictured him. Tall and washed out, his scant hair was yellowish gray and his mustache a grayish yellow. There were no hairs above the ears, below they were sparse and withered. The flaccid cheeks, the loose, fishy mouth, the long, protuberant nose and the narrow forehead were changing from yellow to white by—apparently—too much washing. The flabbiness, the huelessness of the man was in his voice even, which was thin and white. His wan eye gave an occasional dart, when Laura shifted her position or made a gesture. This chance illumination of the eye seemed for a moment to vivify the pulpy figure, but only for a moment; presently the flabby body relapsed to a jellied state and its only token of life was the colorless voice; but the colorless tones were at times insinuating; again they were suggestive; they were always interesting. He spoke facilely. He was conversant with the arts, with paintings, with books, with music, with plays. He had a personal acquaintance with many artists.

But with succeeding minutes Laura became ill at ease. She had disliked him in the initial look, and though his talk interested her, the more wine he drank the stronger her repulsion grew, for with increased potations the dormant animal concealed in the pulpy

man awakened. The appearance of the real creature was gradual; it became slowly visible in the creeping glow of the skin, the steady brilliancy of the eye, the nervous twist of the nose, the nervous quiver of the mouth. Not an indecorous word came from him, however. He expressed no thought not in perfect propriety—until the bill was paid and the waiter was feed. He then moved almost imperceptibly on a tentative plane. It had always afforded him the highest gratification to promote the interests of people of talent, preferably the interests of young ladies without influential connections. If he could do anything *more* for Miss Darnby would she be good enough to command him? The emphasis on the *more* prompted Laura to demand:

"You say more, Mr. Strathmore. Am I indebted to you in any way?"

He promptly replied: "Indebted, no, no. But—perhaps Mr. Sheehan will tell you that I suggested more prominence in the press in your behalf."

She understood. There had been complete silence but for his slight sips of coffee, taken at leisurely intervals, and the light, genteel showers of the crested fountains.

When he put the cup down, empty, he drew his head toward his shoulder, leaned forward and asked slowly and deliberately: "Laura, will you permit me to entertain you this evening?"

She had expected something of that kind, but not so soon; nor did she expect it would come in that way. His abrupt familiarity shocked her; his cool self-possession in posing the question gave her a momentary feeling of humiliation. Her face lowered for a moment and changed color; then she raised her eyes and said decisively: "No" in a tone an octave above the conversational key and rose.

The waiter, at a deferential distance, stood in an uncertain suspense; the woman had risen, probably waiting to be assisted with her cloak. But the liberal Mr. Strathmore had not changed position. The waiter thought he saw something painful between the din-

ers; he decided to see nothing until the liberal Mr. Strathmore should give him a cue.

Laura reached for her cloak. Strathmore rose lazily. He drawled: "Oh, you are going, are you?"

She answered firmly: "Yes, I am going. Waiter!"

Seeing the liberal Mr. Strathmore up, the flunkey responded.

"I didn't suppose there was so much of the prude in a divorced woman."

The answer came: "You see there is; and with it there is disgust for very ordinary libertines."

She winced him quite as much as he startled her by his knowledge of the past. Obviously some one—very probably Sheehan—had been busy with her record. Who had imparted the information? Protony? No. He had shown too much regret for his part in her dismissal from the Marshall Company to reveal the miseries of her experience. Carr? Again no. She had left town long before Sheehan first called at Mrs. Quincy's. A fairly certain solution offered itself when she returned to her room—after having been escorted to the carriage by a fellow whose self-control was so demoralized by the appellation "ordinary libertine" that he churlishly declined to enter the cab. There was a letter on the table in an inscription which she recognized instantly, though not seen since what had seemed the forgotten past; it was an appeal from Darnby for money. He was in dire distress. He had lost his last dollar at Sheepshead Bay. He was threatened with expulsion from a Raines-law hotel. In barely decent grammar and crude phraseology he was cheaply sentimental in a peroration meant to move her to assist him. Fag ends of cigar clerk's pathos—"Remember what we were to each other; I can't forget the lovely days we passed together. I know I was not good to you sometimes, but I always loved you," etc., etc.—made up the last paragraphs. The concluding line assured that he would return in a little while any sum she might send him: "So help me, God!" The cheap, degraded effrontery which the plea implied—its puerile presentation—aroused in her

a mingled feeling of peculiar contempt and gratification. Contempt for him; gratification in the thought that she had at least the strength to emerge from the mud in which Darnby was living. The certainty that Sheehan had been posted impelled her to apply the letter to the gas light in order to be rid of it as of some pestilent thing. She retired, nauseated with Darnby, with Sheehan, with Strathmore.

The feeling was not dispelled when the maid brought up, at about noon, a letter inscribed in a loose, nerveless, uneven hand. Strathmore begged to apologize. For the first time in his life he had lost control of himself. He wished to be forgiven for his discourteous treatment if for no other purpose than to have an opportunity to make amends. Might he hope that she would drop a line of forgiveness?

She did not gratify that hope, not even after Sheehan had called and urged the acceptance of Strathmore's offer to star her. To that end a play would be written for her—Sidney Kleeblatt would write it.

No! No! and again No! She would not accept; she would have nothing to do with Strathmore. And would Sheehan oblige her by not calling again? She did not need an agent.

CHAPTER XXI.

PERFUME AND VIVID HUES.

The next morning *The Wire* published a paragraph suggesting that the *Princess Chali* in the "Oriental Nights" had changed out of all recognition. Notwithstanding the warmth which her role had suggested she had become cold; her coldness affected the ambient air so that one was immune from fervor or fever in her presence. Neither prosperity nor adversity had taught *Princess Chali* anything; she continued to add to her surplus zeal in her own behalf and a deficit of discretion in behalf of others. Her insubordination was the terror of the stage that tolerated her.

This thrust was soon followed by others in the various papers that had puffed her. The fateful consequence was a change of atmosphere at the theatre. The call-boy again spoke to her in a loud voice. Sigman resumed his familiarity; Bolton's head was high, his face stern when he passed her and as before he forgot to speak. Some members of the chorus took on a sniffing air whenever she appeared; a few, the frankly frail, smiled maliciously. Before the end of the week the postman brought her two letters. One was from Ross, urging her again and again to come to the Waldborough—curious that she always heard from him in days of distress. The other gave her an acutely disagreeable sensation; it was merely a bill "for services rendered" from Sheehan, but the sum demanded was sensationally large, $500.00 almost the amount of her savings.

That night as she entered the dressing room after the last curtain a note was handed her, from Bolton notifying that the management having decided to make certain changes in the cast, Miss Darnby's engagement

with the Victory Company would be discontinued two weeks from date.

Laura readily perceived the cumulative pressure brought to bear and it aroused her to resentment, but she commanded herself sufficiently to give no intimation of what she would do. She determined to embarass Bolton. Knowing him to be shrewd and suspicious—aware that he would be on the alert—she appeared as usual the first and second nights following the notification. The third evening she went to the dressing room as usual, at the customary hour, taking care to be seen by Sigman and some other members. At ten minutes after eight o'clock—or five minutes before the time set for the curtain to rise—she walked out of the stage door unperceived. Half an hour later Sigman, red and short of breath, appeared at Mrs. Quincy's imploring Laura to return. The curtain was being held. He promised everything and anything; Bolton would retain her and increase her salary; she would be starred in the next production. Finding her obdurate he changed front and threatened all manner of things; he would have her denounced in every paper in the country; she would never get another engagement; she would be sued for breach of contract, for the management was entitled to a fortnight's notice. At this juncture Laura calmly wished him "good night" and walked upstairs to her room.

She awoke early and her awaking moments were charged with terror at what she had done. Sleep had banished anger. The morning's calm brought full realization of her audacity. She feared to look at the morning papers. In her terrorized state she sent for Ross, who came within half an hour after the messenger had found him. She told him everything—about Sheehan, about Strathmore; the change from deference to indignity at the theatre. Ross had listened with rising approval—indicated by nods and looks. When she had finished he asked if she had read the papers.

"Good, don't read them to-day. They do not treat you well, and it would only exasperate you to read

them. Madge Fleming was put in your place after they had held the curtain for an hour. Now, why don't you come over to one of my hotels. I'm pretty well known among the profession and among my acquaintances are several managers. After what has occurred—you've got an undeserved reputation for insubordination—it may not be easy to get another engagement without assistance."

She thanked him sincerely, but said that this of all times—when she had just been dismissed, when she was without an engagement—would be the most compromising for her to accept. What she really wanted of him was to help her to get her version of the trouble in the press .

"I'll get Ringold to square you with some of the papers," he instantly promised. "You remember Ringold? He was a Chicagoan. He says he met you at Rector's with Protony one evening. Yes, the soldierly fellow, who translates plays. He's now editor of the *World Wide Magazine* and stands well with the New York papers."

Both Ross and Ringold were prompt, for the next day a circular letter appeared in all of the morning and evening journals; it was an unmincing communication, trenchantly written and signed by Ringold. Its purport was that Miss Darnby's original sins were independence, a high view of her art and a just estimate of individual dignity. Thus equipped it was infallible that she should offend those managers who had made an industry of an art; infallible that she should give outrage to diseased vanity and to egregious egotism Her latest offense was to defend personal purity against libertinism. Because she did not care to exchange her person as well as her talents for money she had offended the keeper of an exhibition where amplitude of limb was the cardinal requisite of success and where the estimate of women was oriental and nothing but oriental. If the management felt at all constrained to refute these inferences specific facts and names in proof were forthcoming. An interesting bill for services rendered by a serviceable fellow about town was

ready to be given in evidence of an earnest beginning.

Laura saw that the allusion to Sheehan had a double purpose; primarily it was a notice to the journalists who had in turn attacked and eulogized her that their connection with Sheehan was known; literally a warning to Sheehan to desist from any attempt to intimidate her. Soon after she received a note to come to the Waldborough immediately.

A bell boy guided her through a labyrinth of corridors to a high and sweeping parlor in purple, where Ross and a rubicund man were awaiting her. She was introduced to an Englishman who remarked at once: "Oh, yes. I think she will do. Just the look; just the build." He then explained: He was Mrs. Michael McDonald's manager. Mrs. McDonald's leading lady, he feared, would fail them in New York. She was playing her roles in Chicago through sheer strength of will; but nothing must be left to time or chance during the New York engagement. It was as necessary that Mrs. McDonald make a favorable debut in New York as in Chicago—in Chicago where the people had risen to her. Here were the parts *Marie* in "Magda;" *Ellean* in "The Second Mrs. Tanquery;" *Gertrude* in "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith;" *Clara* in "Mariana." Would Miss Darnby look them over at once and perfect herself in the first of these at least? There would be no trouble about the salary.

She thanked Ross gratefully, and sped to Forty-second Street and buried herself in the parts for a week. Sunday afternoon the district messenger service requested her to appear for rehearsal Monday morning at the Liberty Theatre. It was definite that the leading lady could not play. From the day when Laura had first read of Mrs. McDonald—an impressionist critique cabled over from London to the *New York Diary*—when New York was new to Laura—her interest in the British actress had been aroused. In the criticism Laura felt there was psychic affinity between herself and the woman, for the description of Mrs. McDonald's spiritual and tempermental qualities had drawn her sympathy completely; a feeling of accord which can

never be expressed in words—it can only be divined by each of us according to the instructions of our hearts. And from the day of Mrs. McDonald's American debut at Chicago Laura had eagerly followed the reviews of the performances as they were wired from the West. The reports of the actress' art were confusing and contradictory; they countered and crossed vehemently, but there was unanimity as to the woman's unique force.

Laura's sensations as she entered the stage door to meet Mrs. McDonald were disturbing; extreme eagerness, diffidence, even fear were strangely commingled.

A regal figure stood near the center of the stage, the head lowered to a pamphlet which she held in her left hand. Though extremely tall and commanding, a slight elegant bend took from her height and added to her interesting appearance. One would have at once inferred her to be a queen accustomed to command admiration yet winning to preserve it. The head lifted, a pair of large, dark eyes, liquid, luminous, set in a mobile, olive-tinted countenance; a face with a fine nose of nervous nostrils, a warm mouth with rich, sensitive lips. A luxurious bank of black hair of Southern sheen crowned a woman which was English in form and Latin in face.

"I am sure this is Miss Darnby. Let me make you welcome."

So, too, was the voice un-English; a rich contralto; deep, melodious, haunting; a voice from a land of golden sunshine, of a sky intensely blue and waters of sparkling emerald; a voice from a poetic and ancient country; the voice of a soul that had once lived in an Aeolian harp; the tone was as if heard in a dream; reminiscent of a distant joy, an everlasting hope; suggestive of a world that might be.

Laura drew back, awed. But only for a moment. The warmth of the smile, the welcoming attitude of the hand attracted like a magnet.

"I know that we will get on famously. I already see that you possess an inestimable quality: promptitude."

"And I see that you set an admirable example in that respect."

"In me that is not a virtue; I am stage manager."

Laura was profoundly surprised. Yes, Mrs. McDonald staged every play; presided at every rehearsal; she designed all the costumes, attended to all the properties. It was quite necessary that every detail have her personal attention since the character of her repertory was of a school foreign to the traditional stage manager—plays by German and Scandinavian realists, by the one English naturalist, by Belgian symbolists. She wished to abandon the empty and unreal past, wished to concentrate her energies upon the works of men who were striving to do living things—dramas quickened by the life of to-day. "The masses—the barbarians of art—are content with seeing something going on. They want wrecks, robberies, assassinations. The semi-refined demand something that will move their emotions; psuedo-sentimentality, artificial comedy or tragedy, anything that will make them weep or laugh. But our authors appeal to the completely refined; to those who can be made to think."

"Such writers were more successful," she added, smiling quizzically, "if they could find interpreters who had thinking faculties . It is difficult to make the profession understand these plays."

Laura was soon made aware of the difficulty. She was introduced to a lot of stiffly polite English men and women whose intellects seemed to be as stilted as their manners. Time and again they were besought: "Please don't take the scene that way. Here, something like this. Be as the man and woman of a human world." Or again: "Miss Arliss, you are an actress, you are acting. There is no place for theatrical people in this play: We are dealing with men and women." Or again: "Mr. Wadham, please lower your voice and repeat those words quietly but firmly."

"I regret," she said to Laura, at the end of the rehearsal, "that your part is not longer in 'Magda.' Your conception of it, I can see, is so true that you are sure to be conspicuous. We shall

be antithetical: I, the elder sister, who have had the strength to crush through the deadening conventionalities; have had the force to defy society in general and the iron rules of a bourgeois home in particular; have triumphed over the instincts of blood. While you, my sister, are all that I am not—obedient to the convention of society and the home. The play is well-named 'Heimath' in the original. Why 'Magda' I wonder? Why not 'Home' as in the German?"

Laura hardly heeded the words. She was absolutely drawn by the woman's face as it mirrored the sentiments spoken. But the first night, which Laura, despite her experience, dreaded with the apprehension characteristic of a novice—or a genuine artist—she quite forgot herself in her eagerness to see the superlatively individual work of Mrs. McDonald. From the moment that high, lithesome, strangely magnetic presence entered the scene its face was beautifully serious—the deep and soulful beauty of one who is in harmony with herself in having resolved to live a life dictated by her own reason and not by that of others or by the rote of tradition. There were moments in scenes when she appeared to Laura as if she perceived the white light of art; a great glory seemed to have fallen upon her visage as the shadow of a greater. It was then that Laura drew back awed. Anon, she was a woman of passion; one who delighted in gold, marble and purple; delighted in brilliancy, solidity, color; whose five senses were made that they might become articulate; who spoke for them all with a dreadful unconcern; whose words were in love with matter that enjoyed their lust and had no recollection; one who loved imperishable things; the body as generation after generation refashioned it; the world as it is restored and rebuilt; loved gems, hewn stone, carved ivory, woven tapestry and perfume and vivid hues. She seemed a pagan Roman woman with the intensely black hair and eyes; hard and delicate with something of cruelty in her sympathy with things that could be seen and handled; who hated the soul for its qualifying and disturbing power upon the body;

but not the body as a frail, perishable thing that she wished to perpetuate; it was the beauty of life itself imperishable at least in its recurrence. Again, there was a quick change to spirituality; an ethereal being stood before Laura; a devout creature who had penetrated to the chamber of a great art; had sounded the deep and secret joys of mystic communion, had witnessed the unveiling of the inner beauties of the highest life by proving her love and worthiness and was rewarded by that ineffable rapture which only art can bestow, when it responds to the earnest interrogation of a worthy supplicant. When, at the finale, she sank to her knees—moved to the genuflexion by the death of the father whose inexorable volition had been opposed by her invincible will—a hallowed hush, as if by command of an invisible spirit, came upon the audience. Never had Laura been so thoroughly lifted out of herself, never had she felt the supreme calm of spirituality as when she looked upon that upturned visage in mute prayer. The Roman woman was transformed into a Madonna whose evolution was answered in a glimpse of sublimity. In that moment the secrets of existence were opened to Laura, mysterious things flitted over her soul. Life seemed wonderful, seemed holier.

For several minutes not a sound was heard from the huge mass now divided by the curtain from the stage. Then in a sudden charge of unanimity a prolonged peal of thrilled and thrilling paeans. The curtain went up and down, up and down, and Mrs. McDonald bowed and bowed and bowed. The enthusiasm roared thunderously from the top, but it was not subdued from the circle and boxes.

Laura was aglow with gladness that the audience had been spell-bound by the truth of the actress' exposition. The purely unselfish feeling did not escape the perspicuity of Mrs. McDonald, who, as she passed her to the dressing room, said: "Will you come to me when you are dressed?"

Laura rushed her toilet in feverish haste, and hurried to the Latin artist with the English name and

manner, who was then in the hands of a deft but unhurried maid.

"The audience seemed pleased with our work, Miss Darnby."

"Pleased" seemed such a woefully inadequate description of the big, palpitating fact that Laura burst the bonds of conventional reservation with:

"Oh, Mrs. McDonald, they gave you the most wonderful reception! And yet it is not half what you deserved. But I never supposed that our fashionable world could be so moved."

"The fashionable people were moved because it is the fashion to be so. I—not my art or the plays I produce—am in vogue in London. It were too long—and the matter too involved—to tell you how or why I was taken up by the set who confer and diffuse social distinction in England. From the day I was hall-marked socially, everything I did in the theatre was approved. The English, who never would have Ibsen or Suderman or would permit any of their own playwrights to do anything stronger than the teacup and saucer kind of plays, took Ibsen and Suderman from me, an innovation that allowed Pinero to do "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith" and virile things of that sort. In a way, it was a ludicrous incongruity; the very class that had made it impossible for a dramatist worthy of the name to get a hearing in London—who insisted on the plaything play—came to applaud the impossible because it was presented by me—who, by the merest chance, was socially baptized. And because I am received in certain London drawing rooms, your "dollarocracy" is besieging the theatre and my hotel. Invitations, invitations, invitations, nothing but invitations—and nearly all from Fifth Avenue. It was grotesquely contradictory; the 'dollarocracy,' whose desire is pleasure, crushing to see unpleasant plays; problem plays; psychological plays that demand thought and a world sympathy—and all because they are presented by one whom a king happened to approve. A strange contrast, indeed; they who are chiefly responsible for the shal-

low optimism of the day, crowding to see pictures depicting the dark, stern realities of life."

"Yes, we have much in common with the English."

"Much? Everything—everything except language, of course," she smiled at the cynicism that had escaped her. "But I do hope that the New York critics will not be influenced by the size and character of the audience that greeted us to-night."

They were not. There was no difference in the kind of admiration they had of the actress; it differed in degree only. But they were savagely apart in their judgment of her repertoire. The most of them sentenced it off-hand. Laura liked the dramas. They requisitioned to the full her intellectual capacity; they completely engaged her sensibility; they asked all that her heart could give; they gave her a deeper appreciation of the play that Robert Ringold had adapted from the German.

Ringold was one of her early congratulators the day following her appearance with Mrs. McDonald, the day that she finally decided to take a room at the Waldborough. He purposed devoting a long paper to the English actress in the next number of his magazine. Would Laura introduce him? Gladly.

He came to the back just before the curtain fell on "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith" and awaited the introduction with the nervous trepidity of a lad who is to meet his ideal for the first time. It was to be seen that she favored Ringold. She looked him frankly in the eye, extended her hand freely, though not unfemininely. Her frankness, her sincere ease put him in self-possession at once. He expressed as well as he could, verbally, his admiration of her as an exponent of the abiding things in dramatic art, as the one actress in the English language who had intellect to appreciate and the moral courage to produce such plays. An omniverous reader, she knew the long-established magazine which he was regenerating; she had read two articles on the modern drama written by him.

He experienced the intimate gratification of relatively unknown writers when they find they are ap-

preciated by one who is really authoritative. He, on his part, complimented her. He wished to convey his admiration in quiet dignity. Instead his compliment was charged with moderately suppressed ardency: "You delivered those lines to the duke: 'You are going as surely as the people are coming' with the fervor of a zealot; they electrified the house. Even the boxes were aroused as I never saw them before. But," he added gravely, "that is about all you must expect from our aristocracy of wealth—applause. A few of them will buy a picture with a big name at a big price now and again. Their 'patronage' of art stops at that, with the exception of the spendthrift subscription to the opera. They would not open their purses even for this if opera had not become an incident to a social function. Why, New York will not maintain an orchestra that musicians can respect. We must go to Chicago or Boston or Pittsburg for orchestral music. The American millionaire will do nothing for the theatre. He confines his contributions to the support of the individuals of the profession—provided the individual is young and attractive and has no moral scruples."

"Your criticism, Mr. Ringold, covers the whole Anglo-Saxon race, which insists that if the theatre must do something serious occasionally, it should restrict itself to shallow optimism. The play is considered a plaything that should either amuse the mob or conform to the view of life entertained by a girl of sixteen. I have striven to present the continental idea to England, but have not succeeded in getting a sincere hearing. London stuffs my suburban playhouse every night when I am there, but the town cares nothing for the plays I produce—they come to see me, because it happens to be good form. I am to them a fad, nothing more. And you have taken me up here for the same reason."

"But you have made some of us think." Lowering his voice to a more confidential tone, he added: "I wish that Miss Darnby were always with you. She has it in her to respond to higher things in your art. For

perfect development she needs only the environment which you afford."

"I agree with you," was the quick response. "Her comprehension of these parts is sane and lucid. Hers is a fine, healthful mind—" She stopped, Laura had approached. "We were speaking of you," she resumed. "I wish that I could have you in London. However, perhaps—perhaps—" she did not finish what Ringold more than wanted Laura to hear. It was as if a vague possibility that she could not well express had occurred to her.

CHAPTER XXII.

REFINEMENT'S REFUGE.

"It is a burning shame that you are not in a high-class company," said Ringold, taking up the theme on the way to the hotel. "In a company like that at the Fourth Avenue or the Royalty or the Keene, companies that remain in New York, that change their plays with sufficient frequency to develop every vein in your splendid talent. It seems to me that Ross could do something for you in that way. He's well in with little Gars, one of the big men of the theatrical world."

Laura had thought of that. She had heard that Gars was one of the silent partners with Ross in the ownership of the Waldborough Hotel—where nearly all the high-salaried actors were guests—and inferred that his business relations had made Ross' influence effective enough to reinstate her in the good graces of the theatre powers. And Ross anticipated her. "When Mrs. McDonald sails," he remarked, a few days before the expiration of the English actress' engagement, "you'll be asked to sign for a season with the Fourth Avenue Company."

It was the fulfillment of Laura's professional yearnings. A member of the Fourth Avenue Company! This was a position to which every actor not a star aspired. To be a Fourth Avenue player conferred a rare, a fine distinction; it meant refinement, implied the best culture the American stage afforded; signified at least some intellectuality. Though not emancipated from theatrical tradition in dramatic literature, now and again Gars ventured a production that was above the mere mechanics of a playwright's conventional output. The Portuguese Jew, Pinero, who wrote in

English, was played; Shakespeare and Sheridan were occasionally taken up with due humility and expounded with reverence; a good solid German composition was put in scene when the machine-made money-makers displayed signs of fatigue; when occasion permitted a dainty bit of satire like "Society" was understandingly staged.

Laura was not so sure of herself as usual when she sent in her card to Carl Gars, to whom she was admitted at once. In the round, compact, pursy little fellow with the alert almost refined countenance she recognized a figure familiar in the dining room of the hotel. And he put her instantly at ease. He knew her by sight and reputation; was indebted to Mr. Ross for the suggestion that she become a member of the Fourth Avenue. Then he went to the matter in hand briskly. She would be assigned miscellaneous roles for the first season; the salary $75.00 a week. Within a fortnight a new comedy would be rehearsed. Her part would be sent her to the hotel. That was all; the briefness and simplicity of it all surprised her. She permitted herself to remark that she expected more formality, more circumlocution; expected, indeed, an army of people awaiting their turn in the ante room to see the manager who was known as the busiest man in the country.

"You have answered your own question; by being the busiest man I must do my work quickly; and I never see any one personally, except by appointment."

She signed the season's contract with a happy heart and, returning to the Waldborough, thanked Ross with a warmth that flushed his face. His face quickly changed to provisional malaise when he asked: "Did you—did you—meet any acquaintances there?"

"Well—well,"—he cleared his throat—"you know, or rather you don't know"—really for a man of the world Ross was beginning to display extraordinary embarrassment in Laura's presence—"that—that Protony"—why didn't he prefix the Mister?—"is employed there as assistant stage manager."

Without showing the least sign of interest, she an-

swered, unconcerned: "Mr. Protony is nothing to me."

He knew: what disquieted him was that she was still a great deal to Protony, who, when she appeared at the first rehearsal of "The Case of Rebellious Susan" changed color, stared at her without responding to the formal salutation. It was with an effort that he made himself aware of his surroundings.

"I wasn't notified that you were to be in this production." There were distinct tones of reproach and disapproval in the remark.

"Why should you have been notified. You are only a subordinate here as you have been everywhere." The appearance of a stout, spectacled man excused Protony from making a reply, which he was too upset to formulate. Thinking Protony and Laura unacquainted the rotund individual ventured politely, "Permit me; I am Mr. Perley, the stage manager. May I ask if you are the new member, Miss Darnby?"

This was the key-note to the theatre's manners. There were no familiar informalities even amongst the stage hands. Everybody was considerately formal. Immediately that Laura was introduced to Jeannette Huff, the stately leading lady; to Mary Warner, the emotional juvenile lead; to the magnificently constructed Ida Vendome; to the fluttering, diminutive soubrette Alice Shlady; to Henry Favorim, the strutting pug-nosed lover; to Raymond Hackney, the dreamy-eyed romancist; to William Lowney, the rolling voiced character lead and to Mrs. Lowney, the fine flower of dowager duchesses, Laura was aware of a professional society quite different from what she had ever experienced. There was a strict observance of the amenities. The women were graceful, gracious and held the graces as a primal thing. The men were polite and decorous as a corps of diplomatists at a conference involving the destiny of nations. Not that the pursy Perley was not a rigid disciplinarian; but his steeled hand was encased in a velvet glove; his orders, his suggestions were conveyed in pleasant words—unctuously turned. The lack of such association hitherto made Laura ill at ease at the first rehearsal, though

she was well up in her part, though the actors were heedful of her position and though Mr. Lowney whispered encouragement occasionally.

But the evening of the production Laura was in perfect self-command, and she perceived the company's distinction clearer than during the rehearsals. Her small role permitted her to witness the play from the wings during the more part of the evening. She saw that the women were perfect in technique and deportment; that the men looked and acted the part of gentlemen.

The last line of the comedy spoken, Laura went to her dressing room nervous, uncertain. She wondered what position she had assumed in this otherwise fine picture. She felt her imperfections keenly; were they observable to others? Soon she was alleviated by the thought that if badly done her character was episodic; it would not mar the production. She wished most anxiously, however, to have an opinion of her work before retiring, but her innate modesty would not allow her to hint of such a question to anybody, her experience in the profession notwithstanding. She had a hope that Henry Favorim would enlighten her when he offered to escort her to the hotel, but this was chilled near the stage entrance when he introduced her to a matronly woman with a worried look, older than himself, as Mrs. Favorim. She scrutinized Laura sharply at the introduction, bowed only relentingly, then devoted her attention exclusively to Favorim. She told about the impression he had made, went into the veriest details of his acting, answered all his questions in extenso. Not a word with reference to others was spoken; Laura felt herself absolutely forgotten and was only reminded of her existence by a hurried "good night" at the lobby of the hotel, where Ross was awaiting her. He had been at the theatre and elated her by sincere congratulations, and by assuring that Gars was pleased with her first appearance. The encouragement was not modified by the morning papers. All praised the play; nearly all the production. The views on the acting were divergent, but while Laura's

first appearance in the company was dismissed with a few lines the notices were favorable. Nothing was said of her insubordination, of her trouble with other managers. Not in many days did unalloyed gratification possess her so fully as that morning. There was no false note in her satisfaction with herself and her circumstances. She felt that the pinching, trying, goading and miserable past was gone; felt that she was in a new world—on a higher, more refined plane of life where one was shielded from the carking cares and the sordidness of the inferior stratum of the profession.

This ideal mental elevation was presently lowered. The third time she was invited to accompany the Favorims, Laura sensed the wife's jealousy and divined that the jealousy was founded on something more substantial than the consciousness on the woman's part of superior age and an unattractive person. From that evening she went home in Ida Vendome's carriage. Next she read Alice Shlady's ill will; it was not exactly *jealousie de metier*, nor precisely envy of Laura's stature or beauty that the mercurial midget displayed; it was a little of each with a small dose of dislike which some people harbor for new comers. Manifestations of the little soubrette's aversion began with cool, only half-audible replies to Laura's salutations; a few days later she feigned not to hear Laura, passing her without recognition. Presently a spiteful smile would mirror itself upon the diminutive features of the talented creature whenever she met Laura. The latter soon assumed absolute ignorance of Shlady's existence. The indifference that kills infallibly told on the soubrette. She affronted Laura one day with: "You've been married, haven't you?"

"Yes, and you haven't, have you? And never can be. Men don't like a cheap pocket edition of a woman."

This was a home thrust which hushed the peckings in that quarter. But there were disagreeable whiffs, occasionally from other sides. Huff was condescending to a degree that was almost unpleasant. Perley,

the stage manager, became exigent—Laura suspected that Protony figured here. The looks of the supernumeraries were less deferential when Laura passed. These needled currents were fugitive, however, and Laura's ruffled sensibilities were quickly soothed by the invincible gentility of the men (Gars always had an encouraging word for her), and the wholesome comaraderie of Ida Vendome, who was the good fellow of the company. Everybody liked "Big Ida"—everybody from the door-keeper to the manager. Even the pecking, prying, pin-tongued Shlady became rational in the presence of Ida, for that presence was healthful. She was so sane and so splendid that littleness, meanness—everything that was low and unworthy vanished with her appearance. Withal she was womanly in the wide acceptance of the term. And she was the receptacle for the general troubles of the women and the domestic and feminine infelicities of the men. She gave counsel to all. She was indulgent to the foibles of everybody and readily condoned the moral imperfections of her own and the other sex. She called herself the "Lilliputian's Idol." Like most women of massive and imposing charms, she inspired ardent admiration in little men and the ardency intensified the smaller and the more nervous the man. If she did not receive a marriage proposal from an undersized votary at least once a week she was in mock despair. Her lament would be: "I'm fading;" or, "I'm growing thin—I'm shrinking; the little fellows have deserted me." She would call Laura into her room at the hotel and read letters from the "stunted aspirants," as she named them. They were all sternly serious in their protestations of devotion; all were signed, the address following. Laura suspected there was somebody who need not write. She wondered who it was until one afternoon, when Ida was reading an unusually large consignment of amatory epistles, Carl Gars was announced. Ida had just finished a heated letter and was laughing immoderately. "What's the joke? Let me laugh, too," was Gars' greeting as he entered.

"Oh, the little fellows are getting worse and worse as I grow larger. Here's one from a sawed-off that is quite tragic."

The round, diminutive manager became grave of aspect. He had a meaningful look as he said: "I believe it is tragic. It certainly is not a laughable matter." Ida's smile hardened into a repentant expression. Then Laura understood. The identity was disclosed. Laura marveled at their consummate discretion. She had not heard their names connected even by inuendo in or around the theatre. She doubted if any one suspected, for aside from the rebuking remark and the exchange of glances, there was nothing in their countenances allusive of an engagement; for it was apparently a strictly business talk for which Ida seemed prepared. Gars had bought another theatre—he explained to Laura after he had insisted that she remain in the room—and it was his intention to star Miss Vendome—star her for engagements in New York and nearby cities only. He had ordered a play from Hyde Fish the other day which would be finished in a fortnight.

In thanking Laura for her good wishes Ida added apologetically that she had not been at liberty to tell of the plan before. In a day or two a general announcement would be made.

Gars' selection of Ida for stellar honors confirmed Laura in her identification of "somebody;" it also demonstrated to her the all but supreme importance of influence with the influential elements in the profession. This truism wrought deep into her when in response to Gars' request that she step into his office he told her that: "Ida—Miss Vendome—recommends you for such parts as she has been playing here. She leaves us next week. You will have her position and, of course, her salary."

She thanked him in confused delight and expressed her gratitude to Vendome by throwing her arms around her neck and kissing her repeatedly.

Vendome protested: "It was not I alone. I merely endorsed another's recommendation, though I intended

to be the first. Carl—Mr. Gars—wanted my opinion and of course I said yes. I was chagrined that I had been forestalled."

"Why, who was it?"

"Don't you know?" She had turned and drawn the sentence in slow surprise; her glance was of the penetrating kind.

"Protony," came from her. She had hardly uttered the name, when its improbability was apparent.

Vendome was genuinely astonished: "Protony, the assistant stage manager? Why, what is he to you? Certainly not. Can't you think of somebody else?" Her look was again like the glint from steel.

Laura had now had time to bring reason into play. "Mr. Ross?"

"Exactly. But why should you have thought of Protony? Carl—Mr. Gars—on the contrary said that Protony had made disparaging comments on your work."

The quips of mentality—which ignore finely drawn consistency, nice analogy, striking similes—brought to her mind Queen Elizabeth's lover, Essex, who, in jealous frenzy, sought to revile the woman lost to him. Ida's remarks told Laura that she still was the all in all of Protony's life, though now that she recalled him she remembered that he had studiously avoided her since her engagement at the Fourth Avenue Theatre. Neither had she seen anything of him at the hotel, where Ross was as discreetly attentive as ever; or better said, his discretion had not been strained under his increased attention. When she thought of the early days at the Lake Side in Chicago she could not reconcile the Ross of that time and to-day. He was changed —and so was she. And, alas! so was Protony. How different was her position! Then she was apprehensive, clinging, confiding, afraid and yet trustful; uncertain of mind, of feeling, wholly unknown to herself. Now she knew the world, and better still she knew herself. She was confidently poised, aware of the persuasive power of her sex in a magnificently opulent city where that power is strengthened in one

who has just self-appreciation, who has self-respect in the old-fashioned meaning of that term. It had come to her steadily and surely that neither art nor ambition alone will insure a woman against the loss or depreciation of that ineffable influence over men which nature has given her. There are times when art looks hollow and ambition seems a phantasy. To be what nature intended her to be and not to be what many women are, a woman must have a deep but unostentatious recognition of the fact that she is—a woman; rightly estimated, the most precious thing Providence has bestowed upon a confused, inchoate and incomprehensible universe. She had seen gifted women and beautiful women and women both gifted and beautiful totally impotent where a shop girl, with a conscious value of her sex, was omnipotent. As she gradually took to herself the never-changing and ever-effectual truth, Ross' feeling for her deepened to deferential devotion. In little things and large he showed his growing devotion; but in nothing did he show it so much as when Laura asked him one day:

"Where is Clarence Protony? I have not seen him for a long time."

It was an unexepected question; before he answered an odd cast fell in his eye and his head hung quietly. "He's gone over to the other hotel." His attitude told Laura clearly: "My jealousy sent him to the other hotel."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE INTRUDER TRIUMPHANT.

His love and jealousy showed themselves in other ways. He wished to know where she had been when he failed to find her in the hotel. He came to ask her directly and was wounded when she gave a careless or evasive reply. He became disparaging in his observations of Favorim and the other young men of the company; he even had an unkind word for Carl Gars—"they are all free lances and a woman who respects herself must be on her guard." Her room was changed several times. Again, Ross insisted that she take a larger room on the same étage with his apartments. Then he arranged to take luncheon and dinner with her every day. Finally came a vital proposal: he offered to escort her to and from the theatre. She accepted with an air of studied indifference. Even this closer surveilance did not satisfy him. He remained until the curtain went up and returned half an hour before it fell. The newspaper notices of her, which were now uniformly favorable, displeased him. The criticisms of her work did not affect him so much as the complimentary green room gossip. One item in praise of her sunny disposition, her popularity with everybody around the theatre, her charitable nature, moved him to condemn the whole brood of journalists: "They are all grafters in one way or another. They never write up anything without expecting to get something for it. I wouldn't talk to them if I were you."

Laura perceived this passion rising and intensifying from day to day. The subtle flattery which every woman feels in creating that ruling sensation in men was not full compensation for the acute perturbation of mind actuated by the situation. She was determined

not to yield after the manner of weaker or inexperienced women, although yet undetermined what answer to make should he propose marriage. She knew as well as a woman may—which in such a case is knowing—that his passion was become uncontrollable; that he must make an end either by declaring himself or permanently avoid her. She hoped—she hardly knew what. There was to one side material security. Ross' affluence was augmenting rapidly; he was already wealthy. His influence was widening. There was every promise that he would become a considerable factor in New York's affairs. On the other side, there was no love on her part—perhaps, all said, affection for men had been blighted in her by experience. She neither liked nor disliked him. This had its advantages—and disadvantages. There could be no soul-tearing moments, for her, if he proved delinquent. But how would she stand with her art? Her love for it had deepened since her introduction to its rarer atmosphere. Her understanding of it had become broader, clearer. She certainly would not renounce it in any circumstances. And yet—and yet through all these considerations the instinctive want of her sex for a male companion or protector would ebb and flow according to her mood or state of nerves.

With Ross there were no doubts, no hesitations, no misgivings, no subtleties. He had sufficient penetration to know that Laura would entertain only one proposal and he had decided that he would have her if he could on that condition; and he instinctively chose the right moment. Calling for Laura at the theatre as usual one night he found her put out: it was a mixture of chagrin, dejection and exasperation. Protony had again given way to the tension on nerve and brain which constant thought on one idea brings; he had sent a note pathetically pleading for a reconciliation. Perley had weakened one of the scenes and a quarrel had ensued. Favorim had renewed his annoying attentions regardless of his wife's surveilance.

When in the carriage he asked: "Aren't you feeling well?" He was about to affix "Laura" but checked

himself. To that time he had used neither "Miss Darnby" nor "Laura."

"I'm well, but those people at the theatre have a diabolical way of putting me out."

A pause, which Ross broke slowly and in a low voice: "Laura, you know how I feel toward you. Will you have me?" He took her hand.

There had been something in the silence preceding his declaration which had prepared her. She gave no immediate indication of acceptance. In a few moments, as if quite unconsciously, she leaned her head upon his shoulder. He encircled her waist, and kissed her, not so much in passion as in the joy of possessing that which might have eluded him.

Nothing more was said on the way to the hotel. This time he escorted her to the door of her room, where he again kissed her with a "Good night." She returned the "Good night"—and these were the first words she had spoken from the moment of the proposal.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ART BEFORE MATRIMONY.

Her awakening thought was not of Ross, but of the responsibilities and perplexities of the engagement. She lay in bed thinking, thinking. One idea was dominant, determined: She would not give up the theatre. She would not permit marriage to interfere with her art, her aspirations. By degrees ambition had pervaded her; the unnamable fascination of the footlights had imperceptibly enveloped her; by insensible gradation she had lifted herself from the paltry cares, the paltry miseries, the carking annoyances of the conventional life. Her indifference to them had been simultaneous with her steadily augmenting interest in the theatre. From the resolve not to let matrimony thwart her independence there followed a stronger resolution to utilize, if possible, her changed social condition as a furtherance to her professional standing. The yielding mood, the leaning tendency of the day before when her nerves were weakened by the work and importunities on the stage and by the night, were gone. The rest and the daylight had restored her to herself as she would be.

While she was making her toilet, at ten o'clock, the usual hour with her, a bell boy brought a note from Ross addressed "Dear Laura," asking her what time it would please her to breakfast with him. The implication of possession in the address struck her disagreeably. She replied on the same paper: "At 10:30, my customary hour," and signed it L. D.

If the short reply had ruffled his joyous spirits there was no sign of it when he greeted her as she stepped from the lift. His complete happiness infected Laura at first, but soon the strain of restraint

became so pronounced that Ross asked in accents of solicitude: "Laura, there is something troubling you. Tell me what it is. Make a confidant of me."

The question urged her to have an understanding at once. "It is not a troublesome thing exactly. It is a matter that we should have discussed and decided before—before I consented last night." She paused to formulate her position when he, his face changing from an expression of contentment to nervous, pinched anxiety, asked:

"What is it, Laura? What is it?"

"If—when we marry—I expect to continue to act and—"

He interrupted in a tone that told his anxiety had vanished: "Why to be sure my dear girl. I thought out a plan weeks before I proposed to you. I talked it over with Gars. He agreed with me that you were too much engrossed in your work to give it up for anything or anybody. So we've roughed out a scheme to star you." "Yes, to star you," he repeated, noting her look of genuine surprise. "It depended, of course, upon your accepting me as husband"—this with a humorously shrewd smile—"but I insisted that your territory should be confined to New York and the cities that may be reached in a few hours—Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington. You anticipated me. It was the very thing I wanted to talk over with you this morning."

CHAPTER XXV.

LATENT JEALOUSIES AFLAME.

The knowledge of the engagement was confined to three persons—Laura, Ross and Gars. The marriage was not known until the day following the ceremony, when it was proclaimed in the sensational press. To everybody it was a surprise, except to the one whom it struck vitally—Protony. He had feared that culmination. It was the dread, the gnawing expectancy born of sensed rather than perceived danger; a telepathic jealousy, for he had no visual evidence of Ross' intentions; the ostensible facts made for the reverse of what had actually occurred. A guest at one of Ross' hotels, Laura, Protony thought, was at the furthest a circumstantial possibility of a relation the contrary of licit. Protony was not even aware that Ross' influence had made Laura a member of Gars' company. In cool reflection he had concluded that Laura at the Waldborough Hotel was the result of her association with the Gars Company, instead of vice versa. That indefinable sense which is not of the five defined faculties, but lies in the deep covered well called the sub-conscious, had acted as a precursive agent. Yet the premonition did not temper him to the anguish of the morning. Though he read the garishly written news without astonishment—he read it as something that had been inevitable—the forewarning could not forefend the torture that began directly the paper slipped from his clammy hand. It was as if he had swallowed a collapsing poison. He conceived a mortal hatred for Laura; then for Ross; then for both. The hate changed quickly to a passion for her —a passion whose glow was intensified by long passivity and whose virulence harked back to the feeling

that had overpowered him when she refused reconciliation, following their first quarrel.

His inflamed imagination continued to picture Ross and Laura in conjugal relations and the vision threw him into spasms of jealousy, a jealousy which he had supposed to the moment of hearing of Laura's marriage had become innocuous. It would be unbearable torture for him to remain in the Gars Company, where he must see her, must hear her voice night after night. He had decided to resign when Perley, by a remark, stayed his intentions: "Your friend, Laura Darnby, leaves us this week. Gars will star her. Sidney Rosebed will write a play around her."

CHAPTER XXVI.

REALIZING A DREAM.

The character of the play which Sidney Rosebud had been commissioned to write was left to the judgment of that shock-haired, spectacled individual. The playwright called but twice on Laura. The first time "to get a line on her temperament," as he phrased it. The second time—this was a week later, after she had resigned—he had the plot and the characters outlined. The scheme of the drama Laura thought had very familiar ear-marks; the locale of the first act was in the interior of Missouri. Laura would have an admirer and lover. The admirer was from New York, who "happened" in the Western town; a handsome man whose deportment was elegant and whose clothes were irreproachable. The lover, a farmer's son; good, upright, sincere; quite poor and no prospects. Laura would love the New Yorker, who could not fully reciprocate her affection because of her social inferiority. An uncle in the Klondyke would die leaving her several millions. There would be a change of scene to New York City showing Laura in an apothosis of affluence and social brilliancy courted by troops of fashionable men, the most ardent being the New Yorker, who had jilted her in Missouri. She brings the New Yorker to his knees, rejects him sheerly, returns to Missouri and marries the farmer's son.

Rosebed read the surprised disapproval on Laura's face. But he explained with plausible volubility that the plot was nothing. He would fill the play with stirring incidents, with tense situations. The dialogue, he assured her, would be epigrammatic throughout, especially in the New York acts, where there would be an exceptional opportunity for attractive scenery and cos-

tumes. But the crude improbability, the crass conventionality of the story shocked Laura. She protested to Ross, who sent Gars to her. The manager was peremptory in his decision. "You don't want to handicap yourself with an unconventional play at the start, do you? Just let Rosebed and me launch you. After that you may indulge your fads and fancies as you please. I want to make you a success, but I can't do it unless you submit to the usual thing, the usual process. Remember that success in the theatrical business depends upon brokers, brokers' wives, shopkeepers, clerks and shop girls and not on two or three literary cranks with so-called 'advanced ideas.' I know what you would like; your idea would be to call that fellow Ringold in and write something after the manner of those German or Norwegian faddists. For God's sake get Mrs. McDonald out of your head for awhile. She had to start as you are going to start. It was not until ten years later when she had been taken up by society that she could go in for this realistic or naturalistic fad or whatever you call it. The public doesn't accept her because of herself or her play, but because she is or was a social rage. You haven't got to that yet; so meanwhile you had better please the public. Rosebed will fit you all right in the matter of play. I'll do the rest. You see how clever Rosebed is to have thought of placing the first acts in the state where you were born. That will give my press agent a chance to send out some interesting gossip about you. Then you'll have to go to Paris—don't jump; yes, to Paris for your costumes for the New York scene. You could get them here in New York, but the trip abroad for that purpose will mean about a column with your picture, in all the papers, a lot of descriptive cablegrams when you are in Paris and again a column with your picture when you return. I would rather have such reading matter than columns upon columns of favorable criticism. A favorable or unfavorable critique doesn't matter either way. Good or bad reviews from a professional critic never made or unmade a play or an actor. It's the popular gos-

sip about the play or an actor that counts. On the first night of a production—before the critics have written a word—I can tell you within fifty dollars what the week's receipts will be. So you see we must make a right beginning. The rest will be easy. But for Heaven's sake don't interfere with any of our 'literary principles.' Get literature out of your head until hard times come. So long as the country is prosperous the people will pay any money for any kind of show; all they need is to have their attention attracted by advertising—free ads and paid ads. When general business is at a low ebb, why then the good thing only can live. But we haven't come to that. We must make a first-class star out of you while we can. Trust to me and Rosebed. And by the way''—this as he took his hat as a signal of conclusion—"don't take an actress friend with you to Paris, no matter how insignificant her reputation may be. The foreign correspondents and the reporters here might mention her. We don't want to detract attention from you. I don't suppose that Ross will be able to go with you, so I suggest that you engage a bright maid—a negress if possible—or a quiet elderly woman."

Paris had banished everything else from her mind. She heard not a word of his advice after that. Paris! The name aroused a dream latent in her from the day she first took in hand a French primer. It was difficult to realize that she was approaching a realization which had always been to her and to all women of superior intellect and inferior fortune a beatitude so distant in perspective that it seemed impossible of attainment. For a moment she forgot her marriage to Ross, the mass of congratulatory letters and telegrams heaped on the table; forgot her prospective position in the profession; and Gars and Rosebed and Ringold and Mrs. McDonald—everything. Her first matter-of-fact thought came when Gars mentioned a companion. Rebecca, Carr, Vendome—no, they were rejected as fast as thought suggested them. Though they had been disengaged they would meet Gars' elemental objection of having nobody who might divert attention from her.

She conned the mass of felicitations—telegrams from all manner of people; managers, actors, hotel keepers, wine merchants, tailors, modistes. She knew very few of them. Ross knew some; Gars probably knew them all. Rebecca and Carr had sent telegrams. From her mother a long letter. From her father and Protony nothing. In looking over these notes and dispatches she discovered how limited was her acquaintance, how very few her lasting friends. Her parents and Ross and Rebecca Rosenau; Gars and Ida Vendome perhaps—these were all. Cities were wildernesses after all, and the larger the city the fewer the intimacies.

Mrs. Quincy! The very companion if she could be persuaded to go. Action followed the thought. Laura drove over to Forty-second Street at once. Mrs. Quincy was overwhelmed with the proposal. From agitation and confusion there ensued alternate gusts of transports and despair. The chance of re-living a few months of her twentieth year, however distantly or vicariously, threw her into ecstacy—for, to Laura's amazement, Mrs. Quincy had been in Paris forty years ago; the seemingly sheer impossibility of leaving her house and lodgers for a month threw her into the opposite extreme. A council of her maids was held. The girls urged her to go. One of them, Stella, was chosen landlady pro tem.

It was final then that Mrs. Quincy would go as Laura's duenna, a choice that Ross—who had not consulted with Laura about the trip until she returned from Forty-second Street—approved. He added that when Gars had made the suggestion his only concern was the selection of a suitable companion, for in the busy state of his affairs it was out of the question for him to go.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SEA'S MAGIC MONOTONY.

On the day set for sailing the press told of Carl Gars' plans for Laura Darnby—the Ross was not affixed. She would sail that day on *La Provence* for Havre en route for Paris, where an elaborate order for gowns would be placed with Chevet—the famous Chevet, the tailor of queens and empresses. In the meanwhile Gars would engage Miss Darnby's support and Rosebed finish the domestic drama written for Miss Darnby, who had stipulated that Rebecca Rosenau and Miss Carr must be members of her company; accordingly, at no little sacrifice, Mr. Gars had arranged to have these ladies released from their contracts with Roland Marshall and Sol Runnels. A two-column width picture of Laura accentuated the managerial accent of the article, which, however, had the effect of bringing a few of Ross' acquaintances and admirers of actresses and many idlers to the dock.

Without these Laura had not known which of the serried docks was busied with the departure of a transatlantic liner. The Latin people soon made it strikingly obvious. Not that the preparations were consciously spectacular. Never were 'longshoremen and travellers and their friends less self-conscious. But the buoyant temper of employees and passengers made this strip of the harbor a scene of complex and mercurial animation and enlivened the low, lymphatic architecture of the sea-station. The awesome and forbidding aspect of the rafters was relieved by the gayety of fluttering flags from aloft. The roar of trucks on sullen planks was mitigated by commands voiced in a melodious tongue; the oppressive impression made by the prosaic commodities of commerce, in deadly

dull arrays of boxes and bales, was eased by the high-hued gowns of the gesticulating women in whose dark visages were eyes reluscent as pools at eventide. These orbs at the first sign to go aboard were immersed in tears. Parting words were broken by sobs. Embrace after embrace was exchanged and the emotional scene was emphasized by gray-beards kissing one another with the farewell fervency of school girls. In Laura's group there was no weeping; there were many hand-shakes—mainly with people who Laura saw for the first time—and voluble wishes for a happy voyage. Mrs. Quincy's girls and lodgers were far more moved than Laura's well-wishers; there were wet eyes here, but a high-tensioned cheerfulness pervaded all, which expressed itself in a cheer when Ross, Laura and Mrs. Quincy crossed the gang plank to the steamer.

Ross had arranged everything to perfection. The best state-room was secured. He had directed the New York agent's special attention to Laura, who was on board waiting to introduce her to the commander, a bulky muscular sailor, bearded like a primitive Teuton, with no characteristics of the popular conception of a Frenchman except the thick accent when he spoke English. At the final signal Ross gave Laura letters of introduction from Gars to several correspondents of American newspapers, to authors and to Chevet. He gave her only one kiss, but it was prolonged and fervent; the pressure of his hand and the fervor of his lips told her that she had aroused in him all the powerful though incompletely refined affection such men possess. He was the last to leave the steamer, and immediately the plank was hauled in there was a perceptible rumble in the immense shed that sounded absolutely like thunder; it was made by the rush of feet to the extreme end of the landing, where a band had intoned an inspiriting march which Laura recognized as Metra's "Volontier." The leaping tones—measures that inspired joyous courage—had an improvised accompaniment of a choral character. The chorus came from French, Italian, Spanish and American throats that cheered two words in four accents:

"Bon Voyage." The wish was expressed in full chested voices and was stressed by the mad waving of men's hats of every conceivable shape and fashion and of women's handkerchiefs. Ross was at the very front of the agitated mass of humanity; behind him Gars, and back of Gars Ross' many, motley acquaintances.

But who was that in the forward line, at the other end from Ross, half-concealed by the rope's stump, upon which one of his elbows rested? Protony! He and one more were the silent exceptions in the cheering crowd. For a full minute Laura had eyes for none but him, who had been much and now was nothing to her. He saw that she recognized him, but he had not the force to assume other than he was: broken spirited; a drawn, wan face expressing hopelessly dejection, utter melancholy and a gnawing heart.

The other exception stood midway between Ross and Protony; a slouchy, half-drunken, unshaven, leering figure. At sight of Darnby, Laura had no emotion whatever. Her gaze returned quickly to Ross, to whose now mute salutation she continued to respond exuberantly.

When distance had subdued the vociferousness of the adieux the multi-hued crowd suggested a huge fluttering bouquet, endowed for a moment with vocal power. Gradually individuals became indistinguishable; they were welded in a mass—in a throng which, in growing smaller, became mute and immutable; presently it was a vague spot, anon it disappeared entirely.

Then Laura looked about on board. The glow of excitement had faded from faces; they had saddened as land diminished into a shore line on the horizon into which it had slowly vanished.

A woman of commanding presence, tall, strong, a face firm but not unwomanly, who had came on board unattended, was quietly weeping. She was contained, Laura had noticed—the agitation of departure had not suspended Laura's developing power of observation —while the ship was in harbor; but now that land had

disappeared she could not master her feelings. There had been none to say adieu. She was alone. Who was she? The steamer stopped. The big Yankee pilot who had given orders in a high, authoritative tone, descended into a lunging boat. The Latin officers bade him good-by effusively. He responded with a curt flap of the hand, his back turned.

The pilot's departure seemed to be a signal for a quick change among the crew and passengers. Monsieur le commandant doffed his parade uniform for the clothes of a hard working sailor. He appeared less ceremonious, but more commanding. Instead of shaking his hand the French travellers lifted their yacht caps as they passed him. The more part of the passengers, their friends out of sight and hearing—and perhaps out of mind—in selfish haste rushed to secure a comfortable voyage. They cadged for a seat at the Captain's table, for their bath, for a good position for their steamer chair. Women changed their gowns, men their garments. Within an hour there was less color on deck and a total subsidence of excitement. Laura, leaving all material care and details to Mrs. Quincy, remained at the bulwarks.

When the pilot was gone—when he was out of sight—a presentment of the sea's solitude, a prevision of its grandeur came upon her. Though the waters were still green, a sign that the ship was not yet floating over the ocean's greatest depths; though the sun, unobscured by a cloud, warmed the blood and brightened the scene, a circular look at the horizon—offering not an acre of earth, not a yard of sail—gave her a sense of the sublime desolation of the sea.

She was rudely aroused by a man who tottered to the bulwarks, his face a map of anguish. Laura then noticed that several passengers, men and women, were at the ship's side in the throes of sea sickness. Laura had not thought of such a distressing possibility. She turned away. The sight made her unsure of herself. Her condition was voiced to precision by the pretty girl in front of her, who murmured: "Je sens que ça commence," a simple expression, but how

exactly and yet subtly it expressed the fear of the initial stage of the physical malaise. She repeated the almost colloquial expression: "Je sens que ça commence." But the feeling did not go further with her, Mrs. Quincy, nine or ten of the Latin people and herself were unaffected. Toward evening the general trial—the test of the survival of the fittest—had ended. The unfit were few, the fit many. Among the seaworthy to whom Laura was introduced was a priest, whose elevated character was mirrored in a pale and mobile face, expressing the final thought in piety and sincerity; a Canadian—visually a James G. Blaine—who had not permitted a vast commercial business to destroy a deep love of music and literature. A Paris merchant who talked like an artist; a French artist who talked like a hunter; a French lawyer who quoted beautiful sentiments; an Italian pianist—small as a thumb and nervous as an aspen leaf—whose mind when not at the piano was haunted by a liberal income and who spoke of nothing but high, interest paying mortgages; an English actress who traduced the French language mercilessly, dressed dowdily and recited poetry divinely; a Hebrew banker whose smallness of stature was requited by largeness of fortune, who compensated an aggressive manner and acute inquisitiveness by a deep devotion to a pursy and dumpish wife and three disenchanting daughters; two Germans, one who spoke the German of Luxemburg; the other, the German of Austria; several Englishmen; a few Americans; a doctor, Mons. Paquin, his wife, and a Madame Volney. Lastly Mons. Chicard, a professor of French in a New York college.

Before dinner Laura had one prejudice less; was corrected of a cant idea; that beneath Latin politeness everything was hollow. Her quickened perception, her trained observation told her these people were sincerely amiable, that their supposed volatileness was a matter of temperament; they were nervously quick witted, conversational, mercurial; their volubility was physical, not mental. Laura involuntarily compared them with the few Anglo-Saxons on board; how stolid

and stilted, how pompous, how self-conscious were her people! The Latins were frank, free, companionable. She read their individual characters readily. Their beliefs, their hopes, their fears were as an open book. Withal, they were not intrusive, not familiar; they were, to the contrary, tactful and discreet and ever polite. They had the fine intuition of children—they knew to whom to address themselves and how far. To the sympathetic they were whole-souled; to others they were finely reserved or suggestive in an elevated sense. Laura, known almost immediately as an actress, appealed to them at once. The women wished to be her friend. Finding it was her first voyage they made suggestions, offered to assist her. The men showed their admiration, made way for her everywhere, were courteously companionable or deferential, according to Laura's mood or demeanor; the women were motherly or sisterly according to their age.

Mons. Chicard was exceptional — momentarily. One evening while Laura was alone on deck Mons. Chicard's attention crossed the line which divides formal acquaintance from informal friendship. She then provided herself with the usual shield of disapprobation in which at the first sign of the insinuation of familiarity in men she would suffer them to dissolve in their own humiliation. This was effective; it also was an object lesson to others who might have wished to emulate Mons. Chicard. Thenceforth she was immune from masculine annoyances, was free to continue her observations, to study the little comedies and tragedies about her. There was an element of both comedy and tragedy in the affair of Mme. Volney and Paquin.

The former was decidedly handsome. Her physical charms—she was commandingly tall with pronounced contours—were of an ostentatious type. Mme. Paquin's attractions were not, on the contrary, extrinsic. She was tall and somewhat shriven, making an extraordinary contrast to her husband, a big, healthy, muscular fellow who soon was drawn to Mme. Volney. They were placed vis à vis in the dining hall. Their

mutual admiration soon induced them to seek each other's society in the salon and on the promenade deck. For neglecting to endow Mme. Paquin with an engaging personality, Providence's requital was an acute perception combined with determination. She quickly perceived Mons. Paquin's attentions and Mme. Volney's intentions. But she appeared so unmindful that the passengers who had noticed the attachment concluded that Mms. Paquin was not jealous.

This conclusion was modified by an embarassing incident. It appeared that on the third afternoon out Mme. Paquin told the doctor she would not care to take dinner in the salle à manger that evening; as her appetite was not good she would prefer to have a light luncheon served on deck à l' invalide. This proved a stratagem of the most perfidious character. Hearing of Mme. Paquin's absence Mme. Volney invited the doctor to sit beside her at table. At about a quarter after six o'clock, when Mme. Volney and Mons. Paquin had become interested in each other, Mme. Paquin appeared most unexpectedly at the head of the long table. She stood there a full minute—until all save Mme. Volney and her admirer saw her—and her face told she would do something unusual.

"Mme. Volney!" The key was rather high and the tone somewhat metallic. Mme. Volney and the doctor looked up. The former flushed, the latter paled —both felt the premonition of the calamity which occurred instantly, delivered in French:

"Mme. Volney, permit me to solicit a favor of you. Please leave the doctor to his lawful wife and legitimate children. I assure you that I appreciate the compliment you imply by thinking my husband a charming man, nevertheless I must ask you to indicate your admiration in a more formal manner than by alienating his affections from me, who am a faithful wife and who loves the doctor more sincerely than you do."

The warning was uttered in a perfectly clear voice —pitched, perhaps, a little above the medium register—and everybody seated at the captain's board caught its meaning. Mme. Volney in a visible degree

understood the import perfectly. She arose quite agitated, her countenance a plain reflection of her disturbed and painful feeling, and walked nervously to the door, where Mme. Paquin, with ceremonious politeness, stepped aside to let her pass. Then Mme. Paquin took her customary place beside Monsieur: "I am feeling better, my appetite now is excellent; I shall dine here as usual."

The doctor, a French gentleman, who had himself well in hand, feigned his part admirably. He was all niceties and delicate attention. But after the repast, as he crossed the door-sill, his features stiffened and their expression sombered. Neither he nor Madame were seen that evening. Mme. Volney was not visible until the second day—she had a state-room—following the embarassing incident. She then appeared for a most commendable purpose—to solicit charity for an Italian emigrant, who had been disqualified for admission by the Emigrant Commissioners. The rejected piece of humanity was below—an old woman very ill.

Laura went down between decks with the ship's physician. In descending she was assailed by a nameless odor—the malodor of unkempt misery, of unclean nudity. Entering the steerage—in appearance a subterranean arrangement, low and dark like the galleries of a mine—Laura saw a mass of men, women and children stretched on superposed planks or swarming on the floor. She could scarcely distinguish one face from another. Near the extreme end there was a bright light, and in the light Laura saw the face of the priest bending toward the lower plank. Approaching, Laura distinguished a dozen steerage passengers, heads uncovered, on their knees in attitude of prayer. A voice reached Laura's ears that entered her nerves. It began in a moan and ended in a wail. The low gasps, the strident respiration announced suffering. The grating convulsions, the only half-controlled shrieks told of swiftly recurring transitions from uniform pain to intense agony. The doctor glanced at the tortured and writhing bundle of wretched flesh.

"She cannot last half an hour," he said and turned

away. Laura remained, chained by keen sympathy and a feeling that it were not dutiful to desert a dying being, though a complete stranger. Although the profuse gray hair, disheveled, hid part of the face, Laura could see that toil and moil, anxiety, worriment and insufficient nourishment, general neglect of the body and forced starvation of the soul had made their ruthless impress upon the face, which was hard featured and deeply seared. Through the sounds of agony there was articulate lamentation. She was beseeching God to forgive her sins—she who had experienced poverty only and suffered misery throughout her toilsome life. She prayed the Lord to be merciful—she who had found the world so merciless. As Laura heard this agonizing invocation to the Diety from a hard-driven, poverty-killed creature, whose conscience, nevertheless, was so vibrant and susceptible, she—to whom life of late had not spoken harshly—was stirred to consciousness of her moral responsibility.

The body was given to the sea next day. A plank, a shroud and a shot—no more. But it was a funeral that Laura hoped never to forget. The well-pursed, well-fed and well-groomed passengers preferred the salon, their state rooms and their first-class cabins during the brief ceremony. The occupants of the steerage were all present, on their knees, with their heads bowed. The words of the priest's prayer were moving; they were charged with an hallowed pathos that sank into the soul of the soul. He was so calm, so sincere, so convincing, that young man in the dark garb, and his pure face seemed as if illuminated by a Light from Above as he signalled the sailors to offer the Rested Spirit to the waters.

A concert was given the next evening for the benefit of the Fisherman's Life Saving Society. Laura was invited to give a recitation, but she had witnessed death —had felt its mystery too intimately, too recently, to be in a mood to participate in an entertainment. The programme was long enough without Laura's proposed contribution. Mme. Paquin was down to recite "Love's Repentance". The Italian—who was director of the

entertainment and who heroically presented himself with the final number—his own arrangement of Saint-Saens' "Le Cygne"—complimented Mme. Volney with two selections, Bach's "Ave Maria" and the soprano part in the trio from "Faust". In the steerage there was found a violinist—a youth all aglow for his art, whose view did not descend below the clouds—and among the second-class passengers a contralto—a voice deep, rich, finished and majestic—who had just completed a winter's engagement in Montreal. Laura gave her ticket to an old lady travelling between decks, whose refinement of countenance and gentle deportment encouraged the general fallacy that high morality and refined sentiment may grow out of harsh social relations. Laura thought it were better to be on deck alone while the dining room was filled with an elaborately attired audience and resounded with indiscriminate applause to well or ill expressed music and poetry. Laura and Mrs. Quincy went forward to the bow, where she could see the steamer part the waves which were subsiding as the sun disappeared. The gold of the West was turning to a crimson hue, coloring the island-like clouds in the horizon. From dim red there was a change to vague amber. Suddenly a flash of purple, followed by a streak of violet, gradually turning to intense blue. It was night—the gates of day were now closed. Laura turned in the course of the ship—toward the East. An immensity of darkness dotted, above, with stars. The sea was black and hushed. The silence broken only by the throb of the engines. The winds were wholly whist. Looking up she saw the stars appearing rapidly; they shone with a spectral lustre, not affected by the white light of the moon. Right ahead, the sister beam of the Pleiades clustered together and at their view Laura's memory harked back to her school days when she had studied a history containing an engraving of Columbus' voyage. The print pictured the discoverer on board at night, seated near the foremast in deep meditation under a celestial conclave as brilliant as it was to-night; then, as now, a meteor would blaze for a moment and expire in the

star-paved courts of the empyrean. Just then the wind veered: A melody, haunting, appealing, moving, came from the salon, wafted by the night breeze. The air was at once new and familiar; the ear had never heard it, yet it was known to the heart. Like all things of beauty which are responsive, the song explained, gave voice to something fine, latent or dormant within Laura—something she had often felt and wished to express. The little Italian pianist's appreciation of Saint-Saens' "Le Cygne" lifted Laura from the definite anxieties of the world to the indefinite hopes of a higher, a happier, a better life.

The following morning, quite early, Laura saw, vaguely lying in the extreme distance between the sky and waters, a thing dark, misty and immovable.

"Land! France!" some one cried.

"Land, yes," the commander rejoined, "but England, not France—once France, but now England. Those two islands are all that William the Conqueror retained of France. The people there are French to the marrow, but they prefer the British government to ours." Nearer, Laura saw that the long and high strips of land, barren as the fishermen's domain, yet picturesque withal, were separated by a rocky channel, adventurous and as dangerous as a pirate's ambush. In the center, a narrow rock, reaching to the height of either island, which divided the aperture into two passages of menacing, rocky projections. Both openings were filmed with a fine hazy mist, in which there flew and fluttered a swarm of guillemots, the rare birds whose hunters are become rarer with succeeding years.

In the olden time this divide was the scene of many sea-tragedies. It was the pirates' decoy, where wreckers on stormy nights luring distressed ships with signals of refuge. Lighthouses now abounded along the shore. There were two ports and no forts. Further on, when the coast of France was reached, the forts became many. To Laura they marred the picturesque coast of Normandy; they were the surly guards of what she had conceived to be a sunny country. As the steamer

moved further up the watery valley known as the English Channel, the water turned greener, the waves less forceful and the double ("ship to the right") and treble ("ship to the left") toots of the sailor perched on the foremast became frequent. Steamers—light, white and speedy—crossed the bow and stern of "La Provence," which steamed slower as the ships became more numerous. Laura was loath to leave the boat. She had not been ill a moment and now the sun was so gracious, the winds so caressing, the verdant Norman shore—with every foot of every acre industriously cultivated—so restful to the eye. The sight of land had rectified the stomachs of the unseaworthy; everybody was on deck, eager to see, to feel, to comment. French-Americans who had not seen their country for years were quite as agitated as she who saw France for the first time.

There were two simultaneous cries: "Havre!" "Trouville!"

Instinctively Laura turned to the left; an attractive spot, on the slope of a hill; calm and so placed as to have the sun from dawn to eventide. The houses of restful architecture, in reposeful array from the hill to the water's edge. The streets like private driveways. On the beach a few men and women. The latter, when not quite deferentially escorted by the former, were attended by young or elderly companions of their own sex. The place even from the ship's distance had an exclusive, an aristocratic air. The resort, fashionable under many monarchs, drew Laura's gaze until the ship was piloted in the locks. Havre stood sheer before her. The docks swarmed with people and the sombre swarm was relieved by the uniform of the French soldiery. Though the ship's passengers were strangers to those on shore, Laura was disappointed in not hearing a demonstration of welcome; not a cheer was heard, not a handkerchief waved. The crowd was drawn by curiosity; it was coldly curious. Could this be Latin effusiveness—and then Laura remembered that she was in Normandy, amongst the cautious and calculating Normans. It was a relieving transition to

turn from the multitude to the streets. Some of the thoroughfares were rifts into the mediaeval period; small, narrow, devious, picturesque—thoroughly of the middle ages.

Laura landed. She designedly chose a hotel in vogue in the last years of the restoration. The building was of old French, the landlady from the south of France was old French and the service was old French. The welcome was effusive without a suspicion of insincerity. Laura would remember the gracious smile of the daughter with the dark, ardent eyes; the eager bustle of the servants, the anticipatory bustle of the manager. The narrow, spiral stairs; the winding, mazy hallways; the high, carpetless room; the fourteenth century bed, the seventeenth century couch, and the eighteenth century chairs; the huge windows extending from ceiling to floor, in three sections and opening inwardly. And these windows faced the square of Havre, susceptible to the zephyrs of the Seine and the breezes of the Channel. In the center of this sweeping space two statues; one to the memory of the author of "Paul and Virginia," the other in remembrance of the dramatist of "Louis XI." Though both were born here, neither the novelist Bernard de St. Pierre nor the dramatist Casmir Delavigne were associated in Laura's mind with Havre. It was a Norman of Rouen who was constantly in thought as she wandered from the docks to Tortoni's, from the sea shore through the mediaeval passages called streets across the vast carrefour and parks to the residential heights. She thought of "Pierre et Jean," of the many little master-pieces of the same writer that have Havre for their locale.

The wind was forceful along the quay and as its sea-laden breath permeated the wharf, "L'Ivrogne" came to memory; a whistle by one of the steamers in port and "Pierre et Jean" filled the mind. Every step in this city of modern water-front and fourteenth century streets recalled that clear yet intense being whose clearness was classic, whose realism was as unconscious, as irrevocable and as inevitable as nature, whose direct-

ness was epochal, whose artistry remains inimitable in French letters and whose inborn psychology read the miseries of the lowest peasant as well as the cultured subtleties and worldly complexities of a cabinet minister—a psychology that tempted him to penetrate into the regions of the Forbidden Unknown, where he was destroyed.

But the emotions which the thoughts of that Norman stirred were deeper, more intimate when, the next morning, the train entered the valley in which Rouen lies. Perhaps she thought that at the view of the former home of the Dukes of Normandy she should have remembered its historical associations, recalled that the ancient city was replete with stony reminiscences of knight-errantry and adventures of chivalry; remembered that Robert the Devil had lived in yonder house, that Jeanne d'Arc was burned in the market place, that the heart of Richard the Lion-hearted lies in the dome of that imposing church; that from this soil sprang the hero of Hastings, the sons of Tancred and so many more flowers of Norman knighthood. But Laura was not ashamed to confess that she thought only of the Norman author, until one of the most beautiful women with which her eyes had ever been favored appeared on the platform. A tall, curved, sinuous figure illuminated by a visage flushed by a delicate self-consciousness of complex characteristics, potential rather than pronounced. The auburn hair was uncontrollably profuse; the mouth large and warm. The eyes full, negative as to hue—they were not dark—set reposefully; they appeared to reflect all the other colors; they expressed a rich secular heart and an immense temperament.

Her mien was perfect and absolutely self-possessed; her movement graceful, undulating. In attire she was unostentatious. She seemed to Laura to possess in perfection what the Norman writer called the mysterious attraction of sex which infallibly drew men. Yet Laura conceived that this beauty would impart no joy—as all beautiful things should—it was wholly disturbing.

Laura turned to something equally beautiful but of

an altogether different beauty—a river. She knew it was the Seine. It looked serene in the Norman meadows. The train crossed and recrossed it, sped beside it for miles. Here the stream coursed through a farm which had devolved from peasant father to peasant son for centuries—every inch of the soil carefully cultivated—and the houses all encircled by a double line of high, serried trees; there it paralleled the white highway; again it flowed between calcareous hills. Anon it was bordered by pretty landscapes. Very narrow and low steamers crowded with excursionists appeared. Row boats passed. Electric launches flitted by. Laura felt that the fulfillment of a long and ardent expectation was near. Suddenly the river was lost. Large white mansions (many with the legend "À louer") posited in thickly wooded parks leaped into view.

Then all was shrouded in the smoke and darkness of a tunnel. When light returned there was a refulgence of kaleidoscopic splendor. The sun, seemingly passionate with partiality, lit up a mighty, a majestic, a magnificent city. Laura had never seen but she knew that tower, that gilded dome, that church on the heights and the one below, between the streams; that exotic edifice resembling a monstrous bird about to take flight; that arch and those woods just beneath her—she knew that it was Paris.

The depot was not like other depots. The approaches were not dark and grimy and unwholesome; the streets were not defiled; the houses not smoked and leprous; the air was not vitiated. The environments were touched with age, but they were clear and clean and wholesome. The tenements were on high embankments that flanked both sides of the wide space strewn with tracks. Those old buildings were laved and picturesque; were of a uniform height and made an agreeable sky line. Heads of dark hair and eyes looked out of the windows—some small, those of children; others large, those of mothers. There was activity and animation everywhere, but no harsh or strident noises. Bright colors predominated—here a red apron,

there a high-hued kerchief on a girl's head—but no garishness. In an instant the absorbing panorama passed from Laura's intent gaze and they dashed under a very high and an immensely expansive roof of glass.

"We are in Paris, my dear."

Laura heard but did not heed Mrs. Quincy's remark, for her senses were enslaved by the absolutely new situation. Here was something bewilderingly novel. There was great activity without noise or hurry. The clank of wheels, the hiss of steam, the puffs from smoke stacks seemed tempered. At the long and high iron gate which separated the trains from the waiting rooms there was a row of sentinels, one for each platform, and at one of these exits the guard took Laura's tickets.

"This way, my dear; the carriages are here."

Seeing she had not heard, Mrs. Quincy took Laura by the arm and half motherly, half jocular: "My girl, you'll have to keep your head better than this or you'll be lost."

Before they could reach the coach panoply they were countered by something important—the customs office. Both had forgotten it. Laura was reminded of the function by the word "Octroi" over the first door they were about to enter. They found themselves amid a crowd four or five deep awaiting in turn before a long counter the examination of their satchels. Mrs. Quincy suggested that they go back among the trucks and trunks and secure all of their baggage at once.

They were confronted by an alert little fellow, thoroughly military, stern and martinet-like. Laura pointed to her trunk: "Voila, monsieur!" The inspector had a mouthful of interrogations, which he emitted with such velocity that Laura could not keep pace with his questions. Her somewhat helpless hesitation stirred his professional suspicion. He ordered an assistant to open the trunk. During his brief inspection of her effects Laura inspected the inspector. Plainly a drill sergeant; hair and mustache closely cropped and dead white; the eyes metallic blue, restive and keen. His gestures quick and of military precision. Those orbs—their hard vivacity, their military keenness—suggested

fife and drum and somehow brought Napoleon to mind, though they were not at all Napoleonic. Perhaps it was that Laura thought the little fellow had been proud to serve under the Little Corporal.

Finding everything satisfactory, his manner loosened quickly. He doffed his hat in a way that exceeded formality—a requital, probably, for his severe suspicion—and pointed to the counter. By this time two of the minor inspectors of portable baggage were unoccupied. To Laura's amazement they simply drew an unintelligible chalk line through the center of the two stachels, smiled, inclined their heads politely and indicated a conclusion with "C'est tout."

In a moment they were in the outer section of the great station; it was more like an annex than an integral part of the building; or yet, more precisely, like a porte cochère—a colossal porte cochère vaulted and so long that the other end seemed the outlet from a tunnel. Again was Laura surprised. There was no commotion in the prolonged line of cabmen on the other side; she expected an importunate rush among the Jehus; but no; some looked at her with a disinterested stare; others were lazily indifferent. Laura beckoned timidly to the nearest. He remained immovable. Mrs. Quincy did not interpose until that moment, but now a vivid red tinge had touched her cheek bones and her eyes hardened.

"What's the French for cabman?" she asked decisively.

"Cocher."

She yelled the word at the fellow directly across and accompanied it with a threatening gesture. The man took up his reins indolently, directed his horse slowly to the waiting women and Laura named the hotel. He contracted his nose in displeasure—plainly the distance displeased him.

The vehicle was roomy, open, comfortable, and once seated Laura forgot the annoyance of the moment before. The momentary embarrassment had given way to a sensation akin to that which permeated her when she was about to take her first lesson in French. A kind

of trembling adoration for the thing she had loved since girlhood as one may love that which is distant and indistinct. Everything French had fascinated her; French history, French literature, French manners and above all French refinement. Now the feeling was inexpressibly heightened. Before, she had entered her France through a book; now, she would enter the real France—France itself. Her heart fluttered. At the first turn of the carriage her senses seemed to have suspended their functions; they were overwhelmed by their environments. She barely apprehended she was passing a building of unimagined magnificence; barely apprehended a sign "Avenue de l'Opèra." She could see nothing in detail; she was as if in a dream of brilliancy where everything dazzled. Her mind was still catching breath, she was still panting mentally when she was calmed by sight of an edifice that she intuitively knew was holy. The other creation had evoked a vision of sumptuousness, of refined sensuousness; this one of spiritual awe. The horse was driven at a high pace and Laura had just time to read *Magdalenae.* Mrs. Quincy—a Catholic—perceiving the name, His figure and that of the repentant woman, crossed herself.

And then Laura was carried into a scene of such splendor that she could not contain herself. She wept. She breathed Greek ether; she was in the sweeping spaciousness of the Greeks; she saw Greek purity, Greek grandeur. In this seemingly infinite space was an obelisk, glistening in the golden sunlight. On either side of it were stately fountains, whose emissions—thrown from the mouth of fish, dolphins and other oceanic emblems—ended in lacy, graceful sprays; they were undulous and suggestive of the sea with their Nereids wreathed in scallops, corals and seaweed. Around the obelisk and fountain a roadway broad enough for a score of chariots abreast. Flanking these a gorgeous pavement, white, a square wide, and at the extremity a series of seated figures. Surrounding all, gardens, through whose trees penetrated edifices of marvelous beauty,—palaces, churches, legislative halls.

The coachman, observing the impression this archi-

tectural magnificence had made upon his fare, remarked relentingly: "La place est belle, n'est-pas?" Laura heard but could not answer. Later, three weeks later, when she had partly found herself, she tried to tell Rebecca Rosenau in a letter what she felt. "If I were endowed with a sixth faculty, nobly trained and exercised to convey the thoughts, feelings, and sensations of our deep and unknown selves, I might give you a conception of what I felt and thought, of what I was sensible when I saw the *Place*. To use the common phrase of being in another world is a platitude which expresses nothing at all; but taken in a most literal sense the words mean something. If I had been suddenly lifted to another planet, a planet dazzlingly beautiful, of a beauty unimaginable, undreamable, I had not been more lost than I was when I entered the *Place*."

Another turn and they were in a road of surpassing splendor, formed, it had seemed, in a park of regal conception. Laura read the legend on one of the high, artistically designed electric pillars: Avenue de Champs Elysée. Ah, they were appropriately named, these elysian fields; for fields of delight to senses and soul they were, and between these series of luxuriant gardens lay the grandiose boulevard terminating in an arch which was bathed in the purple rays of a setting sun. This powder from the yellow planet also was poured upon the majestic thoroughfare which was charged with two streams of flashing vehicles going in opposite directions.

The vehicle stopped before a vision in white marble; solid, yet graceful, bold in outline yet delicate in execution.

"Ici, Mesdames!"

The coachman had hardly uttered the word when two liveried attendants were at the carriage door. They were all that reminded Laura of an hotel; otherwise it was as if she were entering a palace prepared for her reception. There were no gaping or inquisitive guests inside or out. Save for the gentle splash of the fountain in the rotunda, perfect quiet. The chief clerk

bowed in a discreet crescent, but said nothing until Laura and Mrs. Quincy had registered. Then he spoke the English of an Englishman. They were conducted to three rooms facing the boulevard.

Laura began feverishly to disrobe. Mrs. Quincy looked at her inquiringly: "What are you doing? What is the matter?"

"I want to change my dress and go out—I want to see Paris."

"No, you must not do that. You must rest. Don't be in a hurry. Don't try to see too much in a short time. If you do you'll become exhausted and in the end disgusted. Make yourself comfortable. Order your dinner brought to the room for this time. Read a little while and retire early. See your modists in the morning. Drive around an hour or so in the afternoon and if you are not too tired go to the theatre in the evening. But don't try to see too much in one day."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IDEALS AND AN IDOL.

Laura dreamed that night not of Paris, of Havre, of Rouen, or of the sea, but of Paul Bourgeon. Why that French author should have troubled her sleep passed her comprehension. To dream of Beaupassant, of Azola, of Bidet or even of Sartat had been comprehensible, for she had read these writers quite completely, especially Beaupassant, and had a wish of meeting one of them, but of Bourgeon she had not thought. She was not familiar with his works; had read, indeed, only one of them. Why then should she —ah, yes! she had once read a fragment of science which had strayed into a newspaper column to the effect that the last thing touching thought just before the mind loses itself in sleep will invariably be the subject of a dream. She must therefore have seen something or somebody that reminded her of Bourgeon as slumber softly rendered her unconscious. Her psychological curiosity satisfied, the wish to meet with the famous Parisian recurred vaguely. But how? Who could introduce her? Her letters of introduction to correspondents of American journals? Perhaps—

"Laura, I'm ready, are you?"

Mrs. Quincy's question was a reminder of her prime motive in coming to Paris—her gowns. A sign from the porter and there was one cab less in the long line filed at a respectful distance from the hotel. It was a low, roomy vehicle, and as the day was young the cabman took it for granted that his fares were in no hurry. He drove gently down the wonderfully beautiful avenue across the still and more beautiful *Place*, and into a bustling, dashing street which Laura noticed bore the euphonious name, Rue de Rivoli. He soon

turned and in a few paces was in a broad circle that contained, exactly in the center, a dark, round monument that lifted in the air, away above the harmonious sky line made by the series of hotels within the circular space. There were soldiers and cannon, guns and swords, drums and fifes, and battle scenes chiseled upon that towering memorial which was crowned by a figure in Roman costume.

Cocher, qu'est-ce que c'est là?"

"Mais, c'est Lui!" There was unfeigned amazement in his answer.

"Lui? Qu'est-ce que Lui?" she persisted bravely.

"Mais—mais Napoleon! C'est la colonne Vendôme."

Now she knew, and she was rather discomforted not to have recognized the original of the many prints she had seen of that shaft which was made up of cannon captured by that marvelous warrior.

Again a quick turn and almost directly another. It was a short street, but brilliant with fine shops. At a corner the horse was reined. Laura looked up saw the name Chevet. A simple, modest store, two wooden models perfectly gowned in an unpretentious window, nothing more. Inside a handsome boy in uniform—at the door; a woman on a stool within a wire enclosure opening and filing letters; two men clerks, one of whom advanced politely.

Mons. Chevet? (The interrogation had a note of polite surprise.) But mons. Chevet never came down from St. Cloud before eleven o'clock. And mademoiselle had made no engagement with him? How unfortunate. It is absolutely necessary for Mons. Chevet's clients to make appointments. Mons. Chevet's clients are many. A letter of introduction from Mons. Gars? Oh, very good, very good indeed. If mademoiselle will permit an hour will now be fixed. Say at 11:30 to-morrow morning. Ordinarily he would not dare to take it upon himself to make the appointment, but coming from Mons. Gars—most valued and esteemed client—mademoiselle may be sure to make her arrangements to-morrow.

To-morrow then. In the meanwhile why not present other letters—to the American correspondents of the *Dial* or the *Courrier?* The idea was acted upon the more readily that the *Courrier* office was—the cabman said—only two blocks away. They were hardly in the cab than they stood before a building in a spirited street named Boulevard de Capucin—Laura had quickly formed the habit of looking at the blue legend at the corner giving the names of thoroughfares—a building made conspicuous by a large and glaringly white sign announcing the office of the American newspaper. The interior was altogether modest and it was seen that the two small rooms in the entresol were the offices of not only the *Courrier* but a dozen other American journals and periodicals as well. A tall, slender, gray-haired and youthful looking individual responded to the inquiry: Theodore Stanley. In thoroughly Yankee inflections he was glad to meet his countrywomen. With the directness characteristic of his race he promised at once to introduce Laura to any of the famous people she should elect; or, rather, Mr. Woodlock would perform the function of introductions. Mr. Woodlock was presented. An entirely boyish young man. Though of a self-effacing nature his high English breeding was perceptible in a glance and his English was as restful to the ear as his official superior's tones was grating. He suggested that they go to *Le Barbier;* it was an opportune time—before noon—for the visit, unless the ladies wished to spend half an hour in looking over the American newspapers. No, Laura would defer that pleasure—she almost said duty—for a few days. Anyhow, she read French readily, so would read the Paris dailies and thus keep herself informed. A suspicion of a smile flitted over the young Englishman; he was afraid Miss Darnby would find very little news of her country in the French papers. A line or two of political information appeared once or twice a week but seldom more or oftener. Even the doings of the countries immediately beyond the borders were treated meagerly. Paris was for Paris quite completely—the

residum was for the provinces. Had Miss Darnby observed that they were walking? Then perhaps she preferred to walk. It was not far anyway. Laura had observed so well that she scarcely heard his remarks about the Paris press. The leafy boulevard itself did not draw her observation so much as the people in it. For the first time she saw with clear recognition and in detail. The men belied the foreign fallacy of being small of stature, of being nervous, mercurial and generally irresponsible in movement. Three of five of the men who passed her were above the average height and they were handsome. Nearly all of the young men were bearded in the Henry IVth style. Those who had crossed the middle-age line wore mustaches or were smooth shaven. They moved leisurely, always observantly. Many were dignified, many distingué; a few were heavy of face and body and of movement. Remembering Havre, the contrast in complexion was striking. Here and there a light brown head with metal blue eyes was met. Interspersed again were heads and physiques familiar to Laura in her own country. Of these, the young men were alert in manner; alert blue eyes, alert faces of high healthy color; tall, slight and the glance a spirited fusion of the mischievous and daring. The older men were somewhat bulky of figure; their countenances smooth, massive and deeply character-lined; the eyes were the eyes of the young men, a glittering and interchangeable blue gray. The heads were also massive and when not whitened were from blue-black to brown. When Laura heard one of them speak she was surprised not to hear a brogue. "Why some of these men look so Irish," she remarked. "I could have sworn they were Irish priests or politicians."

"Quite natural. What you see is a racial affinity. They or their ancestors came from the Celtic provinces. Paulus of the Ambassadeurs is a thorough Celt. To you he will seem an Irish comedian."

But the more part of the men were swarthy, the pronounced black hair and eyes of the extreme south

or the modified swarthiness of the country not so far south. Their aspect was Roman.

The predominant hue among the women likewise was Roman. Laura was struck with the similarity of carriage. From the shop girl to the woman shopping the walk was remarkably similar; light, easy, graceful; the lightness, ease and grace of cheerful insouciance. At one place an accident had befallen the street sprinkler. The water had gushed upon the curb and made a little pool. The way the women managed it was a wonder even to Laura, who had studied such niceties. They would stop for half a minute beneath a door way on either side of the wet spot while they picked up their skirts in little gathers in the left hand, draw the bottom tight against the right ankle and start off, lifting the pleats airily before them. Both the dexterity of the folding and the lightness of the holding were touches of grace beyond the reach of art.

Up the resplendent boulevard they continued, Laura finding every step of the way crowded with interest.

"You of the theatre will be interested to know that across the way is the Variéties, where many of Offenbach's opèra bouffes were produced."

A narrow front of Greek architecture, wedged in among a series of shops and cafes; very conspicuous amidst the buildings of uniform style. Placards placed at either side of the entrance to the lobby announced a revival of "Les Brigands."

They turned on a street to the left; not many steps and they stood before a crescent sign, *"Le Barbier,"* the famous French journal. Unpretentious in dimensions but highly ornamental in design, the newspaper building had an entrance like that of a theatre. A stiff and high porter in a gorgeous uniform saluted as they passed. Further down the lobby another uniform of equal height and rigidity saluted. A short turn and they were in a narrow corridor lined with doors. An elderly gentleman in black, supporting, apparently, with difficulty a dome-like head, bowed low, and anticipated Woodlock with "Monsieur Pelletier?"

Precisely.

Would they take the pains to be seated while he announced them?

In the few minutes they waited there was a continuous in and out movement of the many doors. Young men with a busy air hurried to and fro carrying fluttering proof sheets; older men, compositors in blouses spotted with ink, dodged past them. A nervous little man appeared elegantly attired—the elegance was somewhat too striking, the Prince Albert molded too tightly at the waist, the spats too broad, the shoes too pointed. "The society reporter," Woodlock explained.

Other journalists followed; but they were seemingly of more importance; they were in no hurry; their step was more deliberate, their manner more grave and all wore black slouched hats, as though this form of head covering would distinguish them from average mortals. Among them Woodlock saluted a high imposing individual in black frock and white cravat; straight as a drill sergeant; head somewhat whitened —very erect; the mustache thick and horizontal and insolently pointed. "Scholl the famous chroniqueur, and the last of the Boulevardiers of the old school; Henri Murger's friend and the friend or foe of every celebrity since the old Latin Quarter day. He is paid $10,000 a year for a couple of articles a week. Oh, here's Pelletier."

The man who said in a caressing voice that he was altogether enchanted to make the ladies' acquaintance seemed soft and smooth in every particular. Of feminine height and delicacy; the large brown and gentle eyes of a woman; although bearded—black silken hairs—the beard did not conceal a small, expressive mouth. The white hand which he extended to Woodlock was delicate. His bow, his every movement signified grace. First he would beg his visitors to come to his office. On the way up the stairs he assured Laura—in unctuous accents—that it was an unusual pleasure for him to meet Americans. The American ladies were not only more beautiful than

the French but they had the Parisienne's esprit; and then they understood everything so quickly. As for the men, they were phenomenal, nothing less than phenomenal. What force! What energy! Nothing was impossible for an American. They performed the wonders of the world. Lowering his voice in sudden transition he admitted that *Le Barbier* was partial to Americans, for the paper had many subscribers over there. The door opened and Laura stepped into what appeared to be a luxurious library; richly carpeted, elegantly tapestried. In the center, a large heavy sumptuous table, the black hue relieved by a white urn filled with roses. Chairs of every size and description. The room contained a semi-circular bookcase. Laura had been in the editorial department only an instant when her attention was drawn to the portraits on the wall. Many of them she recognized. It was a gallery of famous faces from Balzac down to Paul Bourget, and Pelletier in accents of pride said that they had all been contributors to *Le Barbier*. He was showing the manuscripts of some of these celebrated authors when a liveried porter opened the door and in hurried but deferential tone whispered something. As he caught the name the editor's air of easy courtesy took on a shade of deference: "Ask him to step in."

The portrait that Laura had just been studying was ushered into the room. The editor turned to the newcomer effusively and shook hands eagerly. Laura recognized the identity between the picture and the man, though it was a telling instance of how far the cry between the canvas and the living being. A strong head set firmly and calmly upon large, muscular shoulders. The face a strange blending of contradictory elements; it was martial and dreamy, sensuous and bourgeois. The hair coarse but wavy, short but thrown back, in the fashion of a musician; the forehead broad but low; the eyes large and brown, by turns alert and dreamful; the nose heavy but strong. The carelessly brushed brown mustache, and the narrow stubble beneath the lower lip did not conceal a large, somewhat loose but vigorous mouth. In the

same glance he gave the idea of strength and indifference, of a dreamer and a materialist; of frankness and reticence; of a poet and a man of the world. But through the conflicting impressions Laura felt in an overwhelming way that she was in the presence of a man rather than a writer. The picture had told her nothing, but before the editor pronounced "Monsieur Beaupassant" she knew instinctively it was he—to those who had read him his strangely impressive presence revealed it. His voice harmonized with his personality—it was what she had expected—a deep, round, vibrant baritone with a low nervous note that drew her clandestinely. When she said in an awed, nervous manner that she was very pleased to make his acquaintance, he answered in English, correctly but with a definite accent: "Ah, the pleasure is mine; it is always a pleasure for me to meet Americans."

He shook hands with Woodlock, bowed genially to Mrs. Quincy, who, though she knew nothing of him, frankly looked her admiration of his manly appearance. It was when he turned for a moment to Mrs. Quincy that Laura noticed that he was not tall; the illusion, at first, of his height was made by his muscularity, his athletic strength; a gladiator whom nature had forgotten to endow with the final perfection, stature.

"You are an author I have always wished to meet. I had read only one of your books when I wished to know all about you."

She was more amazed at her bold and direct complimment than he, who allowed an outline of a smile to flit over his countenance. He said nothing in reply but asked with a suspicion of banter in the tone: "And now that you have met me?"

"I am more than gratified. I expected to meet an author, but I have also met a man."

His personality had inspired Laura to a compliment to which he was palpably susceptible. He gave her a deep, a profoundly interested look.

"You are, I believe, visiting this office. May I be permitted to accompany you?"

This was his answer to her uncontrollably sincere compliment—a refined, a delicate, an incisively appreciative reciprocity.

"But you wish to confer with Mons. Pelletier."

"That can wait. Monsieur Pelletier, I have Miss Darnby's permission to see the office with you."

Going up the stair, behind the others, Laura remarked: "Mons. Pelletier is—is—" She hesitated, she could not find the word.

"Feminine you wish to say, I suppose," he interposed. "Yet he is not. In manner he is feline. That softness, that delicacy is merely the velvet glove that covers a hand of iron. He is a fighter. He fears nothing on earth. And he conducts his staff by the rule of absolutism Could you guess what I came for to-day? It is to tell him that I shall sue his paper for libel. And he knows it."

There was something in his element and something in hers that made mutual confidences irresistible.

Laura now asked why with a directness and a tone which were almost familiar. *Le Barbier*, he answered, had imputed to him an intrigue of a peculiarly discreditable nature. It was invented out of hand, simply because he recently had contributed several articles to a rival journal. Now Laura noticed they were in a theatre. The stage a little gem; the diminutive auditorium—a pit and balcony—a dream in white and gold. "Pretty, isn't it?" But Beaupassant continued —an advertisement paid by people of the theatre. Every European player or cantatrice who comes to Paris is invited to display her talents here. The invitation is a courteous synoym for a command. They who ignore these requests are made to regret it. An advertisement for the paper, nothing more. This was all that could be of interest to her. The rest was machinery. There was nothing so repugnant to the artistic temperament as machinery—it was Beaupassant speaking. Art and mechanism were irreconcilable. He addressed Pelletier: "You will please cease your aspersions; otherwise we shall be embroiled in disagreeable litigation."

Turning again to Laura he asked her hotel; and would she give him permission to call? Laura gave a confused yes; a confusion in which sentiments of an overwhelming compliment, of an embarassment of propriety, of a dread of fascination were mingled. He muttered au revoir and walked away abruptly.

The editor showed them the manuscripts of famous writers, but Laura saw nothing, heard nothing. The man in whose presence she had been only a few minutes occupied her intimately and she did not come to complete social consciousness until Woodlock spoke of him, immediately *Le Barbier's* ornate façade was out of view.

"Are you aware that you have performed almost a miracle? You have, I assure you. You have made Beaupassant talk; more marvelous still, he has mentioned something about his preferences and his antipathies. It is a precedent in his reputation for reticence. He is a silent and inscrutable fellow. Nobody knows him. I have heard that Aloza, Bourgeon, Bidet and others who are supposed to know him as nearly as it is possible to know the man do not understand your favorite novelist. He's as taciturn as a Bedouin about himself, and his own affairs. Nobody knows what he is doing. His nearest friends are not aware that he has written anything until the story or novel is in print. Occasionally he will discuss a subject of art, but it is always with clarity and precision; he will tolerate nothing that is nebulous or abstruse or indefinite or undefined. You must say what you mean in clear, plain terms. And with all that his personality is mysterious; there is even something questionable about his birth. His mother is gifted mentally. She is the highest type of the brilliant Frenchwoman. Her husband is connected with the Bourse, but they separated years ago. Meanwhile Flaubert took an extraordinary interest in Beaupassant. He educated him. For years he was his literary instructor. Flaubert and Madame Beaupassant were friends from childhood and there are whispers that the separation of the Beaupassants was caused by the husband's jealousy

of Flaubert. There are inuendoes that Flaubert's paternal interest in the boy was prompted by something more vital than the mere wish to develop the youth's literary talents. It has occurred to me that a suspicion of his illegitimacy has created the secretive strain in Beaupassant; the same kind of morbid trait with which the younger Dumas is affected; but in Dumas the morbidity vents itself in an increasing denunciation of society. Beaupassant never speaks of his mother. He is a profound favorite with Dumas. Dumas is his second godfather as Flaubert was his first. Dumas wanted him to marry, to propose himself for the Academy, but he would do neither. He has sworn there are two things he will never be, a member of the Academy and a Benedict. He is a great favorite with the women of Paris, but he will never allow himself to be drawn too affectionately to any one of them. He wants to be complete master of his thoughts and feelings, he says. He has intermittent trouble with his eyes, so he engaged an amenuensis, who happened to be a highly cultured and beautiful woman. Finding himself attracted toward her, he jumped into a yacht and roamed the ocean until he forgot her."

"Has he no companion whatever?"

"Not in an intimate sense, no. Bourgeon and a newspaper man, La Pierre, are perhaps nearer to him than anybody, but they know only the outer man. I know all this merely from hearsay. I am giving you nothing more authentic than the gossip that circulates in journalistic circles. It may all be true, it may all be untrue. I have retailed the small talk of newspaperdom because I see you admire the man's work—and so do I. I think he is the most perfect, the most finished of French novelists. I would I knew more of him, but I meet him casually only, just as I met him to-day. When we meet alone he asks me about America and his questions are always intelligent; unlike most Frenchmen, however, educated, he has a correct understanding of American affairs in general. Though nobody knows, everybody is acquainted with Beaupassant. When he chooses he

goes in all circles; aristocratic, bourgeois, plebian, monarchistic, Republican, socialist, all are happy to entertain him. He is one of the few men in the literary world who has no enemies among men of letters. He is liked by all and he reciprocates by disliking nobody. While he is a mystery to all, he understands everybody. His understanding of character, especially of women, is marvelous; but again I speak at second hand, or at best from his books. They are playing his drama, "Musotte," at the Gymnase. Perhaps you would like to see it. I should be pleased to secure seats for you."

Yes, but not that night, later. First she must see the Comèdie Française, must attend the Opèra, the Grand and the Comique; after these the others.

Woodlock advised her to go to the Française that evening. Pailleron's "Le monde ou l'on s'ennui" was the comedy. The refinement of the company was well exampled in this piece. They came to a square, busy but unhurried; metropolitan, still town-like; the trees lent a rural air; an exclusive yet an inviting atmosphere; modern yet historical; Laura felt that she was in the presence of an illustrious tradition, of an art under the aegis of an artistic people. Facing her an oblong building with an arched roof. Unpretentious yet imposing; inornate yet harmonious. Under the portico a small poster headed "Comèdie Française" announcing the play for a week. There were two box offices, a woman in each. At the windows a soldier who took Woodlock's order for seats repeated the order to the women and handed the tickets and change to the Englishman with a military salute.

In the evening their vehicle was the eleventh in the row; but so rapidly and withal so quietly were these carriages dismissed that in a few minutes Laura and Mrs. Quincy were passing the superb soldiers standing near the pillars which, in rigidity, they resembled. Directly they were in a wide semi-circular vestibule, where they followed the many women who preceded them from the carriages. They entered a large, lateral apartment. Middle-aged and old women,

all fat, were exchanging metal checks for apparel. Emerging from the wardrobe one of these looked at their seat number and conducted them to their aisle.

"Why, are all the ushers of Paris women?"

"Yes, that much I remember of Paris. And I remember that somebody told me they were made up of women who had failed as actresses and of former mistresses of government officials."

Laura lost Mrs. Quincy's reply in viewing the interior. There were many galleries, but they were narrow. They hugged the walls and left the auditorium free and spacious. The boxes, though numerous, were not huddled in family or familiar proximity; they were politely segregated and some of them extended from the galleries.

But details and audience quickly vanished from Laura in the consciousness of the traditions of the house. A feeling almost sacred, almost hollowed, impregnated her as she thought of the theatre's past. It was this organization that had been led by Molière, that produced his ever-living comedies; this that inspired Racine and Corneille. This the company with which Adrienne Lecouvieur and Talma and Mars and Rachel had been associated. The date on the curtain took her back more than two centuries. She was about to witness the art of players whose ancestry surpassed the splendors of all European playhouses. The traditions of the place swelled her heart, filled her imagination and inclined her head to reverence. She now felt that she was in the presence of something consecrated. Classicism was in the air; a place where a precious torch had been passed on from generation to generation.

She was aroused from her reverie of veneration by hurried raps on the stage floor; these were followed by three distinct knocks. The curtain ascended slowly. A thrill of pleasure permeated her when the cast came on. With her experience of the drama and her ready perception she perceived that the Comèdie Française was not only better than other companies, but entirely different. She noticed that

its manner was suggested by that great body of unwritten laws which none has in his keeping but every member has in his memory and respect. Many of the women were beautiful; to a few nature had not contributed an embarassment of physical charms. But all—young and old—were graceful, agreeable, sympathetic, ladylike. They spoke with purity, in melodious voices; their gestures were agreeable; their movements harmonious and elegant and their attitudes always pleased the eye. There was no false note, no crudity; no awkwardness, no roughness. The men could command the illusion of gentlemen—a form of dramatic art apparently primary yet counting its practical illustration not convincingly exponible by the greater part of actors of Laura's day, whose air, intonation and presence spelled good fellowship and familiarity rather than innate gentility. Here all was smooth and finished, harmonious and complete and elaborated by consummate artistry. Nothing was deemed trivial. Attention was accorded the smallest detail. The servant who took a hat or a cane performed his function as a well ordered domestic in a country famed for its graces; the marquis who removed his gloves removed them leisurely, unostentatiously, almost imperceptibly, occupied the while, seemingly, with an infinitude of nothings.

The actress who played the part of duchess drew Laura particularly. She was a genuine duchess; a woman who was aware but not self-conscious of her splendid ancestry; who combated the inevitable ascendency of democracy with unembittered mockery, yet flouted the uncompromisingly defiant attitude of the reactionary families (families much more recent in heraldry than that of the Duchess, in St. Germain), who accepted her niece's radical husband with frank admiration, observing the while: "My dear girl, how could you have married such a frightful Republican?" then took his arm affectionately: "Come walk with me. I want to talk against your horrible government." Her gowns were black, but her mood and temperament were spirited; her tone, her manner, her carriage be-

fitted one of her station in the old régime, but they were real without simulation. She uttered distinguished impertinences, but everybody loved and forgave her. She had a thoroughly aristocratic temperament but a democratic mind. The same by birth and blood though contrastingly ingenuous was Suzanne de Vallière, the Duchess' granddaughter, and the jeune fille of the comedy. In the actress' conception, Suzanne was the personification of the daughters of centuries of le sang pur, with all of the exclusiveness that the term implies, and it summed up the refinements of a privileged civilization. She was the final issue of ages of exclusiveness, of especial education, of fastidious etiquette. To produce this exquisite flower of rare perfume—this ultra-refined result—men and women in Paris had toiled and moiled and hungered and fought and bled. The Reign of Horror was a protest that the Suzannes were born and raised at too great a sacrifice. For three hours—whilst Laura was under the charm of the French actress' art—Laura protested against the Red Terror's protest. No price she vowed was too dear for such a rapturous creature—the essence of art and feminine enchantment. And the witchery had the vital element of spontaneity.

The curtain down, Laura rose with the voluntary exclamation: "Oh, Quincy, I do not want to act any more." Her efforts, the efforts she had seen at home, seemed fumbling, stumbling; crude, amateurish, primitive, frontier-like, after seeing the superfine art of a perfected civilization. How was it possible to attempt such perfection? She followed Mrs. Quincy down the aisle mechanically in a daze of despair and revering admiration at what she had witnessed. So fully had the performance gripped her from the first act that it occupied her thoughts to the exclusion of joining the promenaders in the foyer. She was aroused by a heavy raucous voice pitched in indignant tones: "Oh Madame! Madame! Is it possible that you would offer me this beggar's coin?"

It was the *garde robe* woman who was protesting at

Mrs. Quincy's meager fee. Laura was hot with embarrassment, feeling that all eyes were focused on her. Mrs. Quincy, though not conversant with French, caught the woman's meaning, but paid no attention to her. Within a flash a coin was flung at her feet. Laura was too demoralized to think of feeing the woman properly. She ran to the exit desperately and there awaited her companion, who came up unruffled.

Laura said nothing in expostulation, for she blamed herself in not remembering Quincy's innate frugality. She decided then and there never to allow her escort to fee anybody in the future. The incident was a false note in the beautiful harmony of the evening, nevertheless, and Laura could not refrain from uttering a curt and utterly displeased "Good night" when she turned off the electric light.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WOMAN'S PARADISE.

Laura's chiding mood had vanished next morning when Mrs. Quincy brought in two communications, one in English, the other in French. The first was from the American correspondent, Stanley, enclosing two seats for the grand opera; the second from Beaupassant in French, who made bold to hope that perhaps Miss Darnby might find it convenient to be at home (chez soi) in the afternoon. The French note fluttered her. She was incomparably flattered. Yet somehow she feared—no dreaded, rather—to meet him. Afraid of herself perhaps. There was something subtly, mysteriously impressive in the man. Much as she would discuss the propriety (or safety) of receiving him, she knew that she would do so.

But in the meanwhile she must keep her appointment with the costumer. She presented her letter of introduction to a short, stout, healthy, grey-headed, matter-of-fact business man, who read the lines hurriedly, said he was pleased to make her acquaintance, called a bulky woman whom he introduced as Mme. Gervaise and then disappeared. Mme. Gervaise submitted a sheath of patterns, suggested one or two. Mrs. Quincy had several preferences. Between the three the selections were soon made. It was all so business-like, so expeditious, that Laura in her disappointment asked: "Is this all there is to your establishment? Where are your gowns made?"

All? at Mons. Chevet's establishment? Mon Dieu! No! No! Mons. Chevet employs 500 people. He has twenty models. The whole upper floor which extends to the Rue de Rivoli, is Mons. Chevet's atelier. Perhaps Madame would be interested if she went upstairs

to-day—Friday? There were quite a number of notable persons there already. Mme. Baretta-Worms was there; and the Grand Duchess of Leuchtenberg and Bernhardt and many Americans.

Through a long corridor and up one flight of stairs and Laura and Mrs. Quincy were in an environment that recalled to Laura one of the vast department stores of her own country, with the difference of quietude and only one instead of dozens of objects of traffic. Mons. Chevet was near the stair entrance and when he heard that Laura had come up to inspect his establishment—she an American actress who would wear his gowns—the bulky and sober man of affairs dissolved into an amiable guide. Did she observe that lady at the counter with the rare sweetness of face? That was Madame Baretta-Worms. She was always considerate, always gentle and deferred to suggestions. A beautiful woman, whose black tresses, luminous eyes and square, firm countenance atoned for the great superfluity of flesh from the rounded neck down. And that tall creature with the air and manner of a policeman? Ah, a different client, the Duchess of Leuchtenberg. She will not suffer an instant's delay or an infinitesimal defect. One day she slapped an essayeuse and terrified the whole force by her temper. And with all her masculine traits she had the most exquisite taste in dress. When she wished she could surpass Mdlle. Bartet in grace of attire. That angular woman with the face of a gamine? Is it possible Mdlle. Darnby did not recognize her? That is Réjane, or *Sans Gêne* as we call her. She is *Sans Gêne* in everything; with the employes, with her raiment, in her speech. Everything goes. She is familiar with everybody and everybody is familiar with her. Bernhardt? Yes; Bernhardt is here. See, there, amid the models, watching the effect of green in the sunlight. Very hard to please, too. She insists upon having several models and they must pose for her and walk up and down innumerable times. For a while the models detest her, but after it is all over, when the Bernhardt in real kindness of feeling offers them a loge in her

theatre and thanks them sincerely for their exertions, they would do anything for her. She is very elusive. Never in one spot more than a moment, never on one topic for more than a minute; always turning, always flitting. You cannot catch a fair view of her. That (there was a malicious smile when he shot the innuendo) has been so since she passed her second youth. Still, a wonderful woman, a wonderful woman, notwithstanding that she never pays her bills here. But no matter, she advertises us throughout the world so that when she does not respond to our collector we always charge it to advertising expenses. Those groups at the other end? A miscellaneous lot—Americans, Brazilians, Chilians; women from the North, from the South—from everywhere. They are easily pleased. Our troubles are all with the Germans, Austrians, the Viennese—and with the Parisians. We—

Laura ceased listening. She was riveted by the sight of several women gliding up and down the aisles—to the south of the vast hall—before some clients. She drew nearer. They were living manikins; tall, well-proportioned, young, with slender waists. Their gait slow, languorous, elegant.

Ah, yes, our models, was Mons. Chevet's comment. From morning until evening they have nothing to do but don robes and promenade through the apartments before our clients. Unless our customer be exceedingly hard to please, they walk by the customer once, offering the front and back view of a toilet. But they are so difficult to find and yet more difficult to retain—the models, not the clients. Artists are always luring our women away to their studios, and when it isn't a studio it is a private establishment offered by a wealthy foreigner or a rich stockbroker. Models are highly paid. When they are virtuous (sage) they are so absolutely; and absolute virtue with an unmarried Frenchwoman who must earn an income means a rage for an accumulation of francs. They soon have a respectable dot and then they are lost to us forever. The others—those who go to the boursier and the rich foreigner—sometimes come back.

You (he meant the American women) are easy to serve. You pay well, you select quickly. Only on one point are you difficult: You will not tolerate the insolence of the essayeuse. You will not accept abuse from them, which, in Europe, is considered their rooted perogative. Hence the only time the essayeuse is on time is when she has an engagement with an American. She is at your mercy, not you at hers. All our women are afraid of her. We should wish to be honored with Madame's presence when our inventions are presented. They are our two gala days of the year. We draw a high curtain at the back of the room and there the models don our new creations. When all is ready they step forth and promenade around the hall and then we note the effect upon our employes and upon the spectators. Ah, yes, it is a difficult profession, this of providing gowns. Racial traits, climatic conditions must always be remembered. We must please the whole world, you know. But if we please Bernhardt or Bartet we are quite sure to please Europe and that quite compensates us for the superstition these charming ladies have in never paying their bills. However, they ask for them—their accounts—and return them with rigid regularity if an error is made. You know nothing of that in New York? you shrewd Americans who—Ah, true! you get your gowns here! Mons. Chevet talked on and on. The loquaciousness of the man who was so frugal of his time—who would meet only by appointment very late in the morning—puzzled Laura for a few moments, but in reflecting it fell to her that his calling was the all in all in the world for him, so once started he knew no end. She had ceased to listen. She was thinking of Beaupassant, and noticing her preoccupied air, Mrs. Quincy interrupted Mons. Chevet's expatiations:

"My dear, don't forget your engagement!"

The hint brought Mons. Chevet, who understood English, to a halt. He bade them a hasty au revoir.

Thus released, they returned to the Champs Elysée, where, two hours later, Beaupassant's card came up. There was a smile in the eyes (not on the lips) of the

novelist, a smile matured by the frank charm of her person, spreading radiance around her. She extended her hand cordially, expecting, of course, that he would press it; instead he raised it gently, even tenderly, to his inclined head and pressed his lips to it. Never, outside the theatre, had she experienced this. It came to her most personally that she was in France.

But she had determined to be terribly direct with him—to express her suspicion at once: "Monsieur Beaupassant, do you really think I'm worth a study for a short story?"

His look told her she was mistaken. The buoyancy vanished from his eyes; it was replaced by a disappointed resignation which frequent disappointment of a similar kind begets.

"I'm interested, yes; but not professionally. I had hoped that you would forget the novelist in me—so few women do."

His voice and manner confirmed his sincerity. She could only say: "Pardon me."

That he could not immediately forgive her she perceived in his reply. "I called to suggest a visit to Napoleon's tomb—all Americans, men women and children, are, I am told, more interested in Napoleon than the French."

She apprehended that he had changed his intentions, because of her suspicious question; no doubt he had intended a drive through the Bois de Boulogne or a call at some distinguished Parisian's house whose afternoon it was. But recantation would be awkward —their aquaintance was too young for that. She could not protest against a carriage even. In crossing the corridor she noticed the hotel attendants glanced at her escort with furtive awe and in the drive of four squares up the avenue, which was gorgeously golden under the sun's rays, there were salutations to the right and to the left—occupants of glittering vehicles going in the same and coming from an opposite direction. The saluting women did not deign to look at Laura; their bows and smiles were for Beaupassant. The men gave her a swift appraising glance in lifting their hats. Once off

the resplendent way and in turning toward the river the greetings ceased. They passed the Oriental-like building, which had the appearance of a monstrous bird about to take wing. Directly below this exotic edifice was a bridge; in crossing it, as Laura was absorbed in the car-like boats, filled with passengers, flitting back and forth, Beaupassant broke silence: "The Seine is picturesque, isn't it? When a young man, in the years I was imprisoned in a ministerial office, the river was my only joy. On a Sunday, in a boat, with fifty sous in my pocket, I was completely happy. To row, to be on the water, compensated me for the six days of miserable drudgery for the government. I have always loved the Seine for the relief it gave me to continue my literary efforts. I love rivers, lakes, oceans. Upon them one finds ideal quietude."

There was a dreamy, pleasurable expression in his eye as he looked upon the stream. Laura saw that he was not a staring, avid observer; he did not observe at all; he became passive, or more exactly objective, and allowed objects and people and events to impress him. As he sat there, his eyes half closed, he was impressionability incarnate. Presently the carriage turned into a broad street with an infinite vista. In the mass, the thoroughfare was beautiful; in detail, heteroclitic Here a shop, there an imposing residence of ancient aspect. A public cabman lounging a few feet from a stiff exclusive-appearing coachman whose horses and wheels proclaimed extreme privacy. "This is Boulevard Saint Germain", Beaupassant volunteered. "Once the most aristocratic street in Paris, the street of the old nobility. There have been many, many defections in the last century, for these people did not recognize the empire any more than they do the Republic. For them government suspended with Charles X. and the tradition is handed down from one generation to another. Many have become reconciled to the new order of things, but there are enough dukes and marquises and counts, or rather enough Duchesses, Marquises and Countesses, to make a society which will have nothing to do with the rest of Paris—their rela-

tions are all with the aristocracy of other nations. Here, in Paris, they intermarry; they live among themselves—they live in the past."

"Do you ridicule them?"

"Oh, not at all. I am one of their circle—just as I am a Bonapartist and a Republican, for I go everywhere when I go at all."

"There, that typifies the Saint Germain set." Laura looked as he indicated. Under a row of lime trees an old-fashioned barouche. A fat, white-haired, red-faced, scrupulously shaven coachman sat dozing on the box. Below, on a bench, an elderly lady and a nun. The first, in plain black, large, rather stout; the countenance severely, uncompromisingly aristocratic—listening to the reading of Bousset.

"That looks like Danton." She pointed to a bold, heroic statue placed in what appeared to be the heart of aristocracy.

"It is he. And the memorial to the great revolutionist was put here designedly—to remind the monarchists that their form of government expired in France a century ago."

The carriage's course was diverted through ancient and narrow streets which were lined with odd chop houses, queer little shops, sinister liquor dens, disreputable curiosity stores and, above, a miscellaneous horde of lodgers. Suddenly, and to Laura quite unexpectedly, a broad, sweeping, refulgent opening, an esplanade dotted with cannons and bent, crippled men in fatigue uniforms. In the background a church-like building with a halo of gold that glowed in the sunlight; a proud, stately edifice; the glittering dome noble and imposingly impressive. A moment later the cabman stopped: "Ici, monsieur!"

Beaupassant nodded genially to the low bow of the old guard at the door. A second later Laura was transfixed. She could see nothing but a high altar of holy emblems clustered about a golden prefiguration of the Christ. From there descended a hallowed light; soft and purple, that transformed the church in a super-

natural glamour. Laura's eyes followed this refulgence, which was lost in a huge basin in the center of the temple. Slowly, reverently, Laura approached the balustrade of the opening. It was a crypt; and in the middle, on a high elevation, slendor, masterly fashioned caryatides which perform the function of pillars for the base. And on this a coffin, simple in design, but massive, imposing, impressive. There were other tombs in this fane—where some of the democratic conqueror's relations lie—but everything, the church, the Christ-inspired altar itself, were lost, forgotten, in the supreme presence of that sarcophagus; it drew one's vision and thought compellingly. The sacred edifice—the church—seemed merely a shelter for the grave. In the rounded excavation a series of angelic figures bearing laurel wreaths. But between these statues of sanctity were tattered things that told more eloquently than monuments or volumnes the story of him whom they encircle. They were flags; ragged, riddled, dusty, bepowdered; emblems taken from the vanquished enemy at Rivoli, at Jena, at Wagram, at Austerlitz. They hung in clusters, bowed, drooping as if weeping for their captor. Laura turned away from the emotional spectacle. Her eyes again met the altar, and there on the marble tablet, immediately above the portals which lead to the subterranean entrance of the vault, was written in golden letters the words: "I desire that my ashes lie upon the banks of the Seine, amidst the French people whom I loved so well." Well may caste and political strife end here; well may the quarrels of nations be hushed; well may racial hatreds cease in sight of that coffin, for even Clio, the judge, the justice of history, lowers her stylus and gazes mournfully upon the casket whose contents is all that remains of many crowns and thrones and world revolutionizing deeds and plans—Death.

Beaupassant said nothing, but Laura knew as surely as if he had confessed it that he was noting the effect of the scene on her. At the exit when he saluted the guard in military fashion, it occurred to her that he had been a soldier, a vocation which seems irrecon-

cilable with the author. When well away from les Invalides she broke the silence interrogatively: "Were you in the army?"

"Yes, I was in the Franco-Prussian slaughter. Yes, I know war. I know what an army means. It means a mob of some hundreds of thousand men; marching day and night without rest; thinking of nothing, studying nothing, learning nothing, reading nothing; useless to others and to themselves; sleeping anywhere and everywhere, rotting in dirt; living as brutes, pillaging towns, burning villages, ruining the masses. Then there is an encounter with another agglomeration of brutes; a horrible clash; lakes of blood are shed; piles of human flesh are mixed with the reddened, muddy earth; corpses are strewn for miles around; arms and legs are torn from bodies, brains are blown out. And all this without good to anybody. And while men are miserably perishing behind a hedge or in a dug-out their parents, their wives, their children are dying of hunger. This is what is called valor, courage, heroism; dying for one's country, for humanity, for a noble cause. As a matter of fact soldiers are the scourge of the world. We endeavor to solve, to control nature; we fight ignorance, superstition and every dark obstacle in order to make our existence less miserable. Certain men—sages, philosophers, philanthropists, scientists—devote their lives to things that will aid and elevate their fellow man. They work incessantly at their useful tasks; make discovery after discovery; expand our knowledge; widen the scope of science; give every day to the human understanding a new thought; add each day to the comfort, to the strength and to the intelligence of their country. War is declared. In six months the chief butchers, called generals, destroy twenty years of effort, of patience, of the result of genius. And this is called purifying a nation. I have seen men transformed into brutes, seen them degenerate into savages; seen them kill wantonly for the devilish delight of killing; kill because of terror, because of bravado. Law does not exist; it is dead; and when all idea of justice had disappeared I saw innocent

people shot who were found on the highway and were suspected simply because they betrayed fear. I have seen dogs killed while chained to the front doors of their masters, simply to try the aim of a new revolver; I have seen cows riddled that were pasturing peaceably, riddled for no other reason than to 'try a shot at something.' Invade a country, cut the throat of a man who is defending his home because he wears a blouse and not a kepi; burn the houses of wretched people who are without bread. Break the furniture; steal all the valuables; drink the wine found in the cellar; violate the women met in the streets; burn up millions upon millions of pounds of powder and leave in the wake awful misery and unspeakable diseases—that is war! glorious war!"

"What have military men done to prove that they are intelligent? Nothing whatever. What have they invented? Cannon and gun—nothing more. The inventor of the wheelbarrow has done more by the simple idea of placing a stick through a wheel than the inventor of modern fortifications. What have we inherited from Greece? Books and statues. What made the grandeur of Greece, her wars or her intellectual productions? Was it the invasion of the Romans that saved her from falling to the most hideous materialism? Was it the invasion of the barbarians that rescued and regenerated Rome? Did Napoleon continue the great intellectual movement commenced by the philosophers at the end of the eighteenth century? I hold that since every government arrogates to itself the right of sending people to their death the people have the right to destroy every government which has failed to maintain peace. My people—the French—have from time to time defended themselves and they were right in doing so. Nobody has an absolute right to govern others; but if such an unwarranted privilege is assumed the assumption should carry with it beneficent results. Every government should avoid a war as carefully as a captain avoids the sinking of his ship. When a captain loses his ship judgment is passed on him, and if he has been negligent or even incompetent he is con-

demned. Why not bring governments to trial whenever they declare war? If the people would view the case in that light; if they themselves passed judgment upon murderous powers; if they would refuse to allow themselves to be killed without reason; if they would use their weapons against those who command them to shoot, then there were an end to war. But that day will never come, I fear."

With a change of thought not to be expected from one so highly organized and cultivated he abandoned war, asking abruptly: "You mentioned the opera as we came up the boulevard; it would afford me great pleasure to escort you."

Laura explained that two seats only had been sent her, one of which would be occupied by Mrs. Quincy.

"Never mind them. I have—or can have—a box." And with the understanding of one profoundly versed in femininity he tempted her by adding artfully: "This —Friday—is one of the subscription nights at the opera. Everybody will be there. I shall be happy to introduce you to some notable people."

CHAPTER XXX

"FAUST'S" FINALE.

If not more distinguished Beaupassant looked more refined in evening vestment. His broad, belligerent shoulders were diminished under the black cloth; his strong, aggressive neck was placated behind the high collar and white tie. His top hat gave him height. His eyes spoke his admiration for her appearance in white. He looked admiringly for some moments before he said a word. Her gown, though seemingly simple, was a study of the couturière's art, notwithstanding its American make; it was fleecy and there were delicate folds and subtle ornamentations.

The magnificent monument with its legend, "l'Acaddémie Nationale de Musique," stood out boldly under the dark blue heavens; to the public massed in front, it displayed its wide ornate facade. The marble colonnade of its gallery was illuminated in a high, glittering light by invisible electricity. Upon the sweeping space in front were cavalrymen directing the circulation of the crowd and the vehicles which swarmed from every direction of Paris—vehicles that revealed, for a moment, through their lowered windows, pale, aristocratic heads, en cheveux, in high relief from rich, light-hued gowns. Coupes and landaus drew into line under the arcades reserved for them and stopped a few instants —just long enough to allow the women of society, on the fringe of society, and those out of society to descend; a descension of physical loveliness divinely clad. Then came the ascension. A stairway beyond the dream and imagination of a poet—it was the conception of one who had been allowed to discount an atom of heaven. The first flight of marble immensely broad and easily, almost imperceptibly inclined upward,

ending in a landing spacious as a theatre foyer and resumed on either side in flights as white and graceful as angel's wings. The whole an inspiration in architecture. It was impossible for Laura to perceive that this fairy-like scene was not part of the performance itself; it was an ascension of the fairies, an endless ascent of women, whose necks and ears scintillated with jewels, whose long gowns trailed upon the stairway. The supremely beautiful entrance was hardly preparatory for the auditorium. The first was ethereal, celestial even; it had the purity and whiteness of a thing superterrestrial. The second had the brilliancy of a thoroughly material world. That essentially materialistic hue, gold predominated. Gilding everywhere; on the proscenium arch—crowded with allegorical figures —on the boxes. But there was modifying red, too, and this rich tone aided in transmuting garishness into a regal luxuriousness. There were masses of boxes—on either side and encircling the entire main balcony. Though many, and orientally ornate, each loge had an aspect of individuality, of strict privacy. The balconies, above the main, were numerous—how many Laura could not count for the brilliancy of the scene—and they were unobstrusive, being narrow, seemingly a mere strip against the walls, which gave the auditorium an air of immeasurable vastness, an appearance of great space for the purpose of throwing the boxes in attractive perspective. Indeed, the opera seemed to have been designed for a sovereign and his court. Looking at the stalls Laura felt herself in the midst of ancient aristocracy such as she had seen pictured of Louis XV's time. The pit was massed, unindividual, obscured. Only the loges and their apparently aristocratic occupants were salient.

Beaupassant had remained considerately silent. He noticed Laura was absorbed in observation, but when she asked: "You have heard 'Faust' frequently, I presume?" a shadow of a smile flitted over his countenance. "Very frequently. As a youth I was present at the first performance. It was at the Théâtre Lyrique. Personally, the music captivated me, but the audience

was cold. The critics pronounced the work a failure. Two weeks later the opera burst into a striking success."

A rapid thumping on the stage—as if some one were calling the auditors to order—followed by three solemn, prolonged knocks, such as Laura had heard at the Théâtre Français the night before. The house hushed. A succession of light taps from the baton on the conductor's desk. An instant's deep silence and the first notes of the mystic prelude ascended from the depths of the orchestra and filled the auditorium with the invisible and irresistible influence called music which penetrated the spectators, touched their nerves, imparted to them a commingling of poetic and material fever, and infused the air with sound waves that to a fine intelligence suggested the ultimate futility of knowledge, far better than the dark auditorium, the somber stage and the despairing gestures of the old erudite Faust.

Two lines of the text clearly enunciated by the tenor sunk themselves in Laura's understanding:

"Je veux un trésor qui les contient tous,
Je veux la jeunesse."

It came to her then, as such thoughts always come, instantly, inspiringly—that if youth be a treasure to men how much more precious was it to her own sex—to whom nature has imparted a mysterious magnet which ceases to attract as years succeed one another; whose attractions consists of a loveliness predicated on youth.

The scenic effect of the second act thrilled her. This was mediaeval Germany—a world living, throbbing, complete. Not a single touch or figure from the immense and picturesque canvas was wanting. The illusion of a colorful town with all its variegated inhabitants was fulfilled to the last detail. Laura forgot there was a stage. In narrow, crowded streets she saw moving, pulsating humanity lifted to an ideal sphere by Gounod's genius. As at the Théâtre Français, every character, however minute, contributed

naturally to an harmonious whole. Everybody had a part to play as well as a note to sing, and in giving of themselves perfectly they made the picture perfect. Everything in that temple of music seemed perfect. The audience as an audience assumed its function in the scheme of art as unconsciously as the artists. Between the second and the third act Laura's eyes if not her ears were fully occupied studying the house, from the hundred musicians, just below her, who formed an unrelieved mass of black to the resplendency in the *salle*.

Beaupassant, being silent, unobserving, Laura turned to him.

"Are you never interested in the audience?"

"In the feminine part, on opera nights, yes, always. But only when the curtain is up, when Gounod is paramount; Gounod, who especially appeals to the heart of woman, who is the tone poet par excellence of love. Then I watch them, your sex, I mean. They listen to music as if they were under the influence of a divine fascination; listen to it as if in the vague immobility of a dream that at times stirs them softly like the first touch of a divine thrill. All, in listening, are a poetical study; their faces heighten, become by turns spiritual and radiant with a tender ecstasy, their eyes become either moist or languorous and turn aside or are raised heavenward. The fans that move toward bosoms are like softly descending flakes of snow; or, better still, like a swoon-like palpitation of the white wing of a wounded bird. Here and there I see hands fall helplessly in the folds of beautiful gowns; or I see that other hands are used to lift the small ivory-ribbed screens to faces that are smiling ecstatically. The wistful, distended mouths with their parted lips seem to me to breathe a fugitive sensuousness. Not a woman with a soul for music dares face music fully; I mean dares to look straight at the stage while the entrancing tones touch her nerves. You may notice that many incline heads toward their shoulders as though they were listening to some one who was whispering something deep and responsive into their ears. At certain

moments the heart-drawn notes of the melancholy violoncello arouse them from their enrapture; then a fleeting pallor flits over their countenances—translucencies of a second, hardly visible, which are followed by momentary trembling. Suspended above the spheric sound, caressing and vibrant, they seem to absorb with their entire entity the song, the emotion of the voice and the strains of the instruments. The whole is a mass of love—for women."

He had just spoken the word "love" when the curtain disclosed the garden scene in the third act. Immediately a sort of amatory fever spread through the auditors, for never had this music—which is essentially love's sighs—been more ardently breathed by two voices on the stage. The vocalists were no longer two actors. They were two beings of the ideal world—nay, they were not two beings but two voices: the eternal voice of the man who loves, the eternal voice of the woman who yields, and together they sighed the poetry of human rapture.

When Faust sang: "Laisse-moi, laisse-moi contempler ton visage," there were in those notes such an accent of adoration, of transport and of supplication that longing seemed to fill all hearts. Laura was quite overcome by the intensity of the scene and not until the final bar—the sad, perennial echo of lovely woman stooping to folly—had died away did she regain composure. Beaupassant then proposed a promenade in the foyer. Two streams were already moving gently, leisurely in those stately corridors whose ceilings were frescoed by a master's brush, whose walls were a succession of pictorial masterpieces, whose illuminations and decorations gave Laura a haunting idea of paradise. As on the boulevard the day before, Beaupassant was frequently saluted and when not openly greeted was recognized everywhere. At the end of the foyer, near the buffet, he was stopped. "Tien! c'est Guy," exclaimed one of them, a man of somewhat common stature but of an extraordinary head; large, heavy; the hair absolutely white but of the whiteness seen on negroes. The eyes, too, were African; the skin had

a yellow tinge, but the features were peculiarly French. Beaupassant presented him: "Monsieur Dumas." Then to the other "Monsieur Bourgeon"—thin, dark hair and mustache, high cheek bones, salient mouth, the complexion pale, a stoop in the shoulders. A slender, rather ungraceful man but the ordinary aspect retrieved by a pair of wonderfully luminous eyes, soft, forbearing deferential even, yet keenly penetrating. Dumas offered a smooth womanly hand; Bourgeon a hard, bony one. Both were fixedly interested when Beaupassant mentioned her country and profession. Dumas inquired of Mojeska. It had been his wish to see her play his *Marguerite Gauthier.* She made the part so spiritual, he was told. And—he hesitated here as if it were an effort to recall the name—Rhéa—did she know an actress named Rhéa? A Belgian, he believed. She had called on him once and wanted a new play. A persistent person, not easy to be rid of. He was surprised to hear that Mojeska had retired and that the name Rhéa was unknown. He added it was in his mind to know the United States personally. He would go over soon and make a study of the country. Was there anything beyond Chicago? California? That was farther than Chicago? Which way and how far from Chicago was New Orleans? Beaupassant intervened; how many times must he (Dumas) be set right on American geography? Had he not been told—

A bell resounded throughout the corridors. The countering procession dissolved. The first notes of the prison scene dispelled in Laura all thought for the time of her newly-made acquaintances, though ever after she saw indelibly M. Dumas' negro white hair and Bourgeon's wonderful eyes. The ballet music of that earlier scene in the work, with the sensuous visions it conjured up, now sounded as the ominous tones of fate, a prelude to prison tragedy. The somber scene brought a sinking of the heart and a terror to the luxuriously sensitized feelings. But gradually its psychic effort changed. The diabolical evil, the wringing remorse were mollified by deep repentance; and then —a burst of spiritual light, of a celestial pardon. To

one side Mephistopheles, the incarnation of the sinister; to the other Faust, the damned sin; in the center Marguerite, a symbol of heaven's clemency. At the beginning Satan's voice was dominant, leeringly triumphant. Faust's the piteous despair of a condemned criminal who has but one bare moment to live and then must be damned perpetually; who wishes the ever-moving spheres of heaven to stand still that time might cease; who would leap up to his God, who in his agony imagines Christ's blood streaming in the heavens, one drop of which would save his soul. *Marguerite*, all reverent confidence; the frail, yielding sinner confident of forgiveness, whose very weakness of sex is extenuation of her sin. Her first tones low, of holy reverence, as becomes one in prayer, drowned by the shouts of Satan and the despairing shriek of Faust; gradually it strengthens, and when the white light from above is revealed to her alone, her heaven-inspired notes hush the vitiated spirits at her side, who descend as she ascends.

"It is a glimpse of the sublime," murmured Beaupassant.

"It is a sublime revelation," rejoined Laura lowly.

"To attain that divine height," he continued murmuringly, "has been given to only three composers of opera, and then once—briefly—to each. Meyerbeer was thus inspired for a moment in the finale to "L'Africaine," Beethoven in the prison scene of "Fidelio" and Gounod in what we have just heard. Wagner is often superhuman, supernatural, even superterrestrial, if you like, but never purely celestial. He is intense, he is thrilling, he holds you in a vise, as it were, but his genius is that of an overwhelming power which cannot for never so briefly lift you to the deities. The German, Beethoven; the Jew, Meyerbeer and our own effeminate Gounod, though of far less elemental power than Wagner, were now and again divinely favored."

"You love music, don't you, Monsieur Beaupassant?"

"As I love all beautiful things that I do not thoroughly understand; as I love flowers without having

a knowledge of botany; as I love women without being a feminist."

They had reached their carriage, but Laura through the press of the resplendent throng had not lost his remark about her sex. Seated, she took up his confession of having merely an amateurish understanding of women. "You amaze me, monsieur; none, I supposed, understood women as you do."

There was a bare suspicion of jocularity in his accents—or was it a lack of sincerity—in replying: "How is it possible to read woman when she is not clear to herself? It is her infinite incomprehensibility that irresistibly draws man to her, and the more incomprehensible they are to themselves and to others the more womanly, the more fascinating. The most complex, the most womanly women are those that are seemingly cool, self-contained; ruled, apparently, by reason. But beneath these triple qualities are contradictory characteristics in three secret compartments: The first is feminine restiveness. The second is filled with a paradox that may be called sincere insincerity, a sort of highly colored talent for doing wrong in good faith; a trait you will find in devout women and women of the world; it is unconsciously sophisticated—and extremely dangerous. The third is replete with disquieting charms; exquisite deceits, delightful perfidies that stop just this side of a vocation for brilliant infidelities—all those perverse qualities that drive simple and credulous lovers to suicide but which captivate experienced men."

Flattered at the subtle compliments to her sex, she murmured half-protestingly: "You artists are all woman worshipers."

"Artists woman worshipers? You surprise me. They are the worst, the emptiest of lovers. Listen: Some years ago I traveled through Sicily, a country, thank God, that is not beset by tourists and accordingly more interesting than any place in Europe. I there saw the statue of a woman. It was not the woman poetized, the woman idealized, the woman divine or majestic like the Venus of Milo; it was the woman as

she is; the woman we love, we desire; the woman we long to embrace. She was buxom, with a full, round bosom; the hips large, the limbs rather thick; a carnal Venus, the Venus of flesh and blood. She is represented as raising a drapery which conceals her womanhood and the entire figure is molded, conceived and inclined for this movement; every line, every thought is concentrated upon it. The gesture is superb and natural; at once bashful and unchaste; hides and reveals; veils and unveils; attracts and eludes—seeming to define completely woman's attitude on earth. It is a miracle. One feels that it will cede to the touch like a palpitating body. The loins above all are inexpressibly fine and animated. It is traced charmingly, that undulous and voluptuous line of woman that descends gracefully from the neck to the heel and that shows in the contour of the shoulders, in the decrescendo of the thighs and in the slight curve from the delicate calf to the ankles, all of the modulations of human grace."

"To me a work of art is not real unless it is at the same time a symbol and an exact expression of a reality. The Venus of Sicily is a woman and also a symbol of sensuousness. In looking at the statues of the Greeks we dream; we are confused; or, perhaps, obsessed by illusions, by figmental allurements. There are women, I believe, who evoke that sort of illusion; they seem to possess and to express something of the intangible ideal. Men pursue without, of course, ever attaining this will-o'-the-wisp ideal, this perfect soul which they imagine they see in a woman's look—which in fact is nothing but a certain shade of the iris—in the charm of a smile barely perceptible upon lips which are as pure as enamel; in a graceful movement which is born of inadvertence and harmony of figure. Poets—Bourgeon calls them impotent star gazers—are always tormented by what they call mystic love. The natural exultation of a poetic mind, impels such elect beings to conceive a sort of superhuman love hopelessly impalpable and ecstatic. And you will notice that poets are perhaps the only men who have never

loved a woman, a real woman of flesh and blood, with all the faults and qualities of a woman, with her charmingly limited rationality, her strange nerves, her disquieting femininity. But if certain women can create in certain men such fine illusions others excite in our veins an impetuous passion which characterized our remote ancestors. The statue I referred to is the perfect image of such a sane and simple and powerful beauty. The head has been lost, but that doesn't matter. Hers is a female form that completely expresses the poetry of passion."

Laura thought it time to discreetly turn the subject. She went to the other extreme by asking: "Monsieur Beaupassant, you have often described death. Do you fear it?"

"I fear and loath it."

CHAPTER XXXI.

PARIS—ITS VISIONS AND SPECTRES.

"Paul Bourgeon" was the name on the card brought up by the bell boy directly after breakfast. Laura was surprised and flattered but rather regretted that Mrs. Quincy was somewhere below roaming about the parlors and reception rooms.. She regretted it the more when Bourgeon entered, a half-familiar, half-significant look in his eyes concealing the effect of his deferential smile and respectful bow. Perhaps it was bold of him—he said—after so brief an introduction, but Mons. Beaupassant's friends were his friends; they had been familiar for years; that is, as intimate as it was possible to be with Beaupassant, with one whose nature was intensely unresponsive. Further—would madamoiselle permit the confidence?—he was in negotiation with an American editor, now in Paris, to go to the United States and write his impressions of the country. Perhaps he might presume to confer with mademoiselle. He was to go to New York, Boston, Washington and Chicago. From these cities he would write a series of articles. The compensation offered was highly tempting—but—but the academy would soon hold an election and—and—perhaps; but that was another matter. When would madamoiselle return? Perhaps (this word which recurred so frequently in his speech had an insinuating and equivocal sound with him) they could take the same steamer. It would afford him inexpressible pleasure to travel with such a beautiful woman.

The beautiful woman was too abrupt a transition. It denoted a carelessness of bearing, a defect in perspective; a want of delicacy; an imperfect understand-

ing or a loose comprehension of foreign women. He had judged Laura an actress who would not only be flattered but eager for his attentions. With the instinctive recoil which men's egoistic presumption usually inspires in fine-nerved women, Laura felt resentment when she perceived the insidious surety and self-sufficiency of his keen, observant eyes.

"You take a commonplace view of actresses, Monsieur Bourgeon."

The sudden accusation did not entirely dispel his conceited smirk: "I want to take a correct view of everybody and everything."

"I've read somewhere that somebody called you *un cochon trist.* Who said it? Augier?"

The rush of color on his pale face betrayed the effect of the thrust, though he responded spiritedly: "Some one whom nature had long deprived of virility."

"And as a substitute gave a higher sense of morality, especially of women. Monsieur Bourgeon, I suppose there is nothing to prevent you from taking the same steamer with myself but—"

There was a knock. She relievedly and audibly read the name on the card which the bell boy brought: "Guy de Beaupassant". He may come up immediately." Turning to Bourgeon: "You shall be glad to meet him here? You are friends, I suppose."

"We are old friends, fast friends, yes." Yet he did not look as if he were pleased.

Beaupassant was more surprised than pleased. They shook hands, but Beaupassant retained his astonished countenance until Borgeon in complete self-command bowed himself out: "I thank you for the information about your country. It is very likely that I shall accept M. Barnett's invitation to go there."

Beaupassant's amazed features relaxed as soon as the door closed. "I've been trying to persuade him not to go to America. His forte is not description or analysis of masses. I'm afraid he will fail in that. His fine talent will not tolerate the study of more than three or four characters; and there he is a master. He goes

deeper than any of us. Not an emotion, not a sensation escapes him. His subtlety is marvelous. But for masses, never."

Even while he was speaking Laura asked herself again why she felt wholly at ease with Beaupassant. She made a quick comparison between him and the man just gone. The latter looked more metaphysical, more intellectual, yet while freely communicative he gave the impression of ever concealing his thoughts—according to Tallyrand's formula. The former she felt to be open, direct, though reticent except to his intimates; one—in contradistinction to Tallyrand's dictum—whose silence seemed to have been given to him to reveal his thougths.

He swerved from Bourgeon, saying in English: "I want to propose something."

"I didn't suppose that you would ever propose to anybody."

"Not in your meaning." (He returned to French.) "There are now three things which I have determined to avoid: Marriage, the Academy, Le Révue des Deux Mondes—I'll never be a husband, an academician or a contributor to Buloz's magazine; for all three mean a repression of personality, a compromise with society, if not a ban upon the intellect. *Mais c'est autre chose.* You mentioned Versailles yesterday. I want to submit an invitation to go there this afternoon and then to some theatre this evening. I leave the choice of the theatre to you."

"Yes, with pleasure. I shall be delighted. I should like to see one of your music halls—Folie Bérgère for instance; and then"—she hesitated here—"I—I—might after that, want to see a little of—of Bohemian Paris."

"With pleasure, with pleasure. A glimpse of the Moulin Rouge or Bullier, or both, and then the Bohemian cafes. I understand. It is quite the thing for everybody, especially for French women of society."

They had not walked many steps from the station at Versailles when Laura saw that the place was neither a suburb nor a country town. There were a few

shops and many residences; the streets wide and white and lined on either side with majestic trees. While neither a suburb or a country town it had least of all a watering-place or summer-resort aspect. It was an habitation apart, unique, exclusive, original, as if not only a king but extraordinary people dwelt there. They met many monks, hatless, shoeless, in rude, brown garbs with ropes around the waists. One—it presented a memorable dissimilarity—was talking to a woman modishly attired, tall, svelt and beautiful. He, gray bearded, heavy; manifestly charged with religious zeal, though his manner and voice were gentle. She listened in an attitude of deep deference.

Laura heard Beaupassant say: "There!"

Looking up she found herself at a magnificent opening and in the back ground a picture familiar from girlhood. She had seen it in illustrated histories, framed upon the walls of friends' houses and read of it in the lives of European monarchs. She recognized them at once; they were nothing new to her—these palaces of Versailles. Entering the iron gateway and approaching them, they became less recognizable, they lost the pictorial idea familiar to Laura. They were oldish; the stones looked shabby, the windows neglected; there was more of an air of negligence than age about the buildings so marvelously proportioned, so perfectly harmonious. Inside, her nerves told her she was in the hall of royalty—of romantic royalty. She had but to look from one of the many, many apartments to the paths, the drives, the gardens (that orangery, how Watteau-like!) to see that refined sentimentality had suggested it all. The court yard, the very nooks and intervals were the product of a mediaeval tendency rather than the dictates of a luxurious king. Laura walked through the gallery of battle paintings without emotion. In the hall of the portraits of rulers she was arrested. The Napoleons interested her, and, strangely enough, especially the picture of the Third Napoleon with his dreamy eyes and inscrutable countenance; yet more particulary the portrait of the Duc de Morny; the face of a real aris-

tocrat; proud, erect, the head firm, the breast soldierly; the countenance light, highbred, with traces of polite cynicism—the mouth that could say: "Establish another empire? Why, certainly, I'm agreeable. It will not last long but 'twill be amusing while it lasts."

Then the hall of mirrors—truly an idea of a romancist of the Middle Ages. Ceiling and walls of mirrors that had evaded time for over two centuries. Laura noticed several Germans, hats on, walking up and down with a bold air and aggressive steps as if their heels were grinding the floor. Beaupassant, quiet to this time, broke silence with: "Look at those Germans. They always have a conquering air in this place. They formed their empire here; their first emperor was crowned here. They seem to have a contempt for the monarchs who have lived here. How different their manner at the tomb of the first Napoleon! There they weep with the deepest admirer of that Soldier of Fortune. It is an extraordinary anomaly that they should be moved at the grave of one who almost destroyed them."

They had stepped into a west front chamber. For a moment, as she looked out of the window, Laura wavered between the illusion of a dream and a mistrust of the sense of sight. A vision of her subconscious longing; a scene that she had seen in some other existence when she was freed from the carking cares of life. Like an artist's highest inspiration; like the best moment in a literary masterpiece; like the soulful notes in music this apparition of graceful poplars, of a romantic stream divided from an ideal lake by an oval yard of groves; and a softly undulating meadow, bejeweled with luscent ponds and ending in a vague, dreamy distance, with an Italian fountain whose pearly sprays were kissed by sunbeams—this Laura knew was a heaven-born sight because, as in the rare moments of painting, of literature, of music, it echoed something subliminal and responded to a promise of a beautiful hereafter.

Though often seen by him, Beaupassant felt the picture fully. "It is an inspiration of past centuries.

No landscape gardener—no, not even a painter of to-day—could divine it. They could only imitate it. Such visions are a rebuke to our age. It would seem that in those days man's soul turned toward art and that a jealous divinity had said to him: 'I forbid you to think longer upon such things; but if you devote yourself to more material things I promise you that you shall make worlds of discoveries.' To-day it appears that the world is following the suggestion of the jealous divinity. The seductive and all-pervading artistic emotion of centuries has been extinguished and supplanted by an order of mind that invents machines of all kinds; amazing apparatuses, mechanisms complicated as living bodies; inventions that combine substances and arrive at results astonishing as they are admirable. And all this to cater to the physical necessities of man—or to kill him. The ideal conceptions of science—pure and disinterested—those of Galileo, of Newton, of Pascal, seem inaccessible to us; our imagination is attracted more and more to inventions of utility. Now, does it not seem to you that the genius of one whose intellect discovered in the fall of an apple the grand law which rules the world is born of a germ more noble, more divine than the penetrating intelligence of your American inventor, of the miraculous fabricator of electric bells, of the telegraph, of the telephone, of electric lights? Do you not see in this difference the secret vice of modern man, the mark of his inferiority in his apparent triumph? I would call it a sheer defeat in his apparent triumph. While he is frankly solicitous of his body, his soul has been starved."

Laura confessed inattention by murmuring, at every fresh look, "How romantic it all is! Romance, romance, everywhere!"

"Let us go below and you shall see."

He beckoned to one of the many cabmen in the half moon court and directed: "Le petit Trianon." In two turns the carriage was in a wood, wild, yet exclusive, old yet not unkempt. The paths appeared not to have been trodden for generations—only the single roadway looked used. The trees were high,

the shrubbery thick, the foliage wildly luxurious. And over all there was something apart from other woodlands Laura had seen. Was it age? Was it the memory of kings and queens, of princes and princesses who had dwelt here? No, it was something more tangible, yet less definite; something that had been stamped there when the palaces were built and that time may never efface.

The carriage's third turn quickened Laura's pulse. The horses had left the wood and dashed into a leafy avenue. Beaupassant saw how Laura was inspired so shouted to the coachman, "Slower." The earth of the roadway was black, soft, though not deeply unyielding, and bordered widely by negligent verdure. But the trees! Elms at once towering and stately and gracious. They were on either side, equi-distant, and met in the very center of the road, forming a romantic arch of nature the whole length to the Trianon. A sweetly melancholy sensation crept over Laura. It recalled to her a French phrase she had read somewhere: "The happy days when I was so melancholy." Her first view of the former homes of French sovereigns drew from her the exclamation: "Oh, Monsieur, how romantically situated!"

The modesty and delicacy of the architecture; its whiteness; its simplicity. Apparently small, compact, it still was royal and spacious. Seen from the exterior, Laura had never believed that the rooms were so many and so airy. She went from one to another and the uniform harmony of the furniture—in color and proportions—surprised and delighted her far more than the richness of the appointments. Tested by the appointments of even the moderately rich in her own land this country residence of the proudest princes of Europe was a negligible affair. The coaches were gilded and so were the couches; the draperies were heavy and of a peculiarly reposeful hue, but they were not numerous. Laura stood long in Marie Antoinette's apartment; that unhappy though vivacious queen had been in Laura's thought the moment she alighted from the carriage. She forgot the several Louises who

had dwelt there; forgot Napoleon and even Josephine; went through their apartments as an ordinary sight-seer—but the daughter of Marie Therese occupied her. She could see the romping yet romantic Austrian gliding from chamber to chamber, from tree to tree, from pond to pond. Though the grand Trianon was designed long before her time, both Trianons and Marie were one, seemed inseparable in an historical sense. Marie was a charming commingling of vivacity and simplicity and romanticism bestowed upon simple unaffected royalty—and so were the Trianons.

A short drive brought Laura to the smallest of the two Trianons and here was romanticism run riot in the pond fringed with willows; the cottages and the marble arbor of love, named Temple de l'amour; in the woods with their hushed, reposeful lanes and captivating perspectives; in the statues—how singularly lovely the combination of white marble amid the arborous green—allegorical of love; in the regal quietude whose impassiveness was deepened by memories of the chivalrous gallantries of the amatory adventures that had taken place here.

There were no tourists, no excursionists here, for which Laura was thankful, and she expressed her gratitude.

"Yes, it is well; it were still better if the crowd did not invade the grand Trianon and the palaces of Versailles. One's artistic sense revolts at the sight of the mob at these places fit only for an old aritocracy. Think of it: the terribly common throng, with its common birth, its common appearance, its common manner and its worse than common ideal, swaggering about in the woods, the parks, the gardens, the lanes, the halls, the very chambers of them who were the exquisities in deportment and breeding of their day. It is an infamous desecration. Even Napoleon (the conqueror not of mere man but of nations) was a garish incongruity at Versailles. Though he had the perception of youth, the intuition of woman and the nerves of an artist, he knew that he had too much of the pleb, of the democrat, to be at home

in the palaces of the Valois; so he spent but little time there. His nephew, Louis, had too, a fine sense of conformity. He and his retinue of political adventurers seldom came to Varsailles and never to the Trianons. But the average passer-by (*Ce monsieur qui passe*) coming here in droves, swaggering impudently, is like spitting in the face of the gloriously exclusive and elegant past. You may think me hypersensitive, but—

"Then perhaps you may not wish to make the rounds this evening?" She said it half banteringly.

"That is a different matter, for in the halls (*bastringues*) and in the students' quarters there are no afflicting discrepencies between people and environment."

Nevertheless, Laura noticed that his contentment was feigned when they entered the theatre of the Gay Shepherdess. The beginning of a disdainful smile shadowed itself upon his mouth as they came to the vast court leading to the smoky auditorium. Laura was too nonplused by her surroundings to comment upon it, still less to suggest retreat.

"Suppose we stop a bit here before taking our seats in the theatre, so as to have done with the whole matter as soon as possible?"

They were soon in the current of the promenade, pressed, pushed, jostled. For a few moments Laura could see nothing but a sea of hats of all kinds and of both genders. Getting to one side of the hall she saw that the crowd was making a circuit of the place around the row of fountains. On either side of them were marble tables, where were seated men young and old, and women young or striving to give themselves a youthful appearance. All had glasses before them; glasses large and small, filled with liquids of various hues, green predominating. At first sight, the women looked handsome, but of a boldly brazen, sensuous beauty. The men were of all races, even Arabs and Madagascar negroes, and these were in company of the youngest and most prepossessing of the women.

Laura was not sure of her eyes and could not contain her astonishment:

"Monsieur Beaupassant, are those girls associating with the blacks?"

"Certainly. Certainly; that's a sign of progressive civilization, you know."

She withdrew attention from them and watched the women in the slowly moving procession; or, more exactly, the women in and out of the procession. They walked in pairs amid this mob of men, crossing the line with ease, gliding between elbows, between breasts, between backs, entirely at home, like fish in familiar waters. Although they had a supercilious air, as though they were indifferent to everything, including man, they would stop now and then and solicit some one to stand treat and when refused would turn their backs angrily and ejaculate a word or two that Laura did not understand. At that moment their flamboyant beauty—the large hips, the swelling bosoms, the enormous black eyes, the huge, red lips—took on something of bestiality. Several were ranged near a bar at the other end of the hall, where the attendants were maids with artificially blond hair—to give them an English look—which contrasted grotesquely with their dark, flashing eyes. The maids were busy dispensing cigars and drinks, the while entertaining a running conversation with the cocottes in front of them; and their ever alert and declamatory movements were reflected in the high and broad mirror back of them.

As the orchestra intoned a Metra march, Beaupassant turned to the salle. "We've missed the first part, but it doesn't matter."

A cloud of tobacco smoke veiled the stage and the other side of the theatre like a thin fog; it was constantly replenished by the white-blue emanations of the cigars and cigarettes smoked by the spectators, including the women, and the moving haze accumulated at the ceiling, beneath the big dome around the superb chandeliers that hung just above the top gallery, and formed strange figures there.

Laura and her escort were enclosed in one of the several rows of open boxes that formed a semi-circle between the orchestra and dress circle; the loges were decorated in red and contained four chairs of the same color, chairs so closely placed that one could barely pass between them.

The raised curtain disclosed three trapeze performers. In the next turn were four acrobats who went through the usual evolutions; following this a prestidigitator, who did nothing that Laura had not seen before. Finally, when a man and a troupe of trick dogs came on Laura asked: "Is there no singing, no acting, no dialogue here? Do they get up these entertainments for people who are deaf or hard of hearing?"

"The programmes are arranged for the benfit of strangers who know little or no French, and for people who are content with seeing something going on. Look about you; in front are peddlers and grocers with their beefy wives, a bunch of stupid heads that watch the stage with their mouths agape. In the boxes, nearly all strangers, from every quarter of the earth —Americans, Brazilians, Englishmen, Japs, Russians, South and North Africans, some with, some without women of the town. Back of you, an extraordinary mixture; the riff-raff of almost every profession; fellows who have failed through corruption or a total want of ability. These are few, however; the crooks predominate. The other sex is all of one character, as you have noticed, I suppose. The same women, in the same number, come here night after night for years except when they are in the hospital.

"I see an annoucement at the end of the programme 'Le Cygne Dormant.' Is it a play?"

"Not at all. Simply a thing for the eyes. There isn't a word spoken. A liberal display of heavy female anatomy. You can see such things much better done at the Marigny in the Champs Elysée."

His inflection was a hint that he had had quite enough.

"Then I had rather—some time—see the thing done at the Marigny."

Before stepping into the carriage she looked him full in the eyes and asked:

"Monsieur, what is it in me that really interests you? Why do you expose yourself to ennui by escorting me to places that are tiresome to you?"

For the first time he betrayed a shade of embarrassment, as though he had been discovered in something he was sure had been perfectly concealed. He flushed; his reply was slow in coming.

"Well, (eh bien) I—I—find you are interesting because—because you are different from our Frenchwomen—because—you—Miss Darnby, I'll be frank with you—later. Before you return to your America I'll give you another reason."

Ah, then there was another reason!

The unstated cause—the unknown, the mysterious—provoked Laura to such absorbing speculation that she did not notice the course and the slowness of the carriage. Not until a stop was made was she aroused. A long, grimy, sinister-looking building; at the height of one's head a blind aperture in the door. Beaupassant knocked loudly. Waiting two minutes he knocked again. At the end of three minutes a board in the blind aperture was withdrawn and in the opening a scurvy head.

"What do you want?" was asked brashly.

"Aristide, if you please, Monsieur"—Beaupassant was very deferential—purposely so, perhaps, in contrast with the fellow's grossness. Monsieur took his time in opening the door and when he did so it was with insulting reluctance. For a moment they were in utter darkness, as though in an antilair to a thieves' den. A second door was opened; the light blinded them for a moment. Four steps down and Laura found herself in what appeared to her a topsy-turvy inn. Bizarre objects hung against the walls. A sanded floor and a long table. At the sides, against the walls, desk-like tables. The ceiling of rafters. At the back, from high to low, a series of shelves, filled

with bottles, decanters, glasses. The light was high and glaring, notwithstanding the curls of smoke puffed by men whose long, black, unkempt hair stuck out in rebellious masses from beneath slouched hats. All the tables were occupied by these individuals; all had absinthe tumblers in front of them, a few of which were full, some half-filled, many empty. There were no women present, but Laura's presence elicited no attention whatever—no attention was paid to her or to Beaupassant. They took two unoccupied seats in a corner, and once seated a waiter grudgingly came up and asked surlily: "What do you want?"

"Absinthe for two."

Turning to Laura: "Of course you will not drink the stuff; neither shall I. But we must do what others do in these places—these poets' dens. They all write verses."

But why is it so difficult to enter? Why is the waiter rude? And are you unknown to these—these literary men?"

"The difficulty of entering is apparent only, the rudeness simulated; they are the trade-mark of the place; all these dens have something to distinguish or to mark them. Insolence is Aristide's trade-mark. I am not known to the people here; even if I were, they would despise me, for I deserted poetry for prose. A prosaist, in the view of Aristide's admirers is a menial of letters to whom any sort of recognition would be traitorous. How do they live? Heaven only knows. Aristide, of course, makes a comfortable income here. Verlaine receives a good price for his lines. For the rest, existence is a mystery. But any one of them who is applauded by the habitués is sure to have his rhymes appear in *Gil Blas* with an illustration by Steinlen, and the glory of such recognition suffices to keep the glorified in purple clouds for months. It's a vagabond life that ends—one in thousends—in permanent fame, in—many, many times—at the morgue, or—what is worse than the morgue—a small, mean, stultifying clerkship. My God! When I think of the souls that have been extinguished

behind counters and bookkeepers' desks; in narrow, stinting marriages; I know something of office prisons. I once was an office clerk, as I have remarked, and I shudder when I recall those days. I had rather be a rude miner, digging in the bowels of the earth; a farmer toiling in the open fields; a common sailor; even a common soldier—much as I hate the horrible trade of war—than hold a clerkship, the shabbiest, the meanest, the most ignominious, the most humiliating position imaginable for a manly spirit. But look; Aristide is mounting the table."

A square, muscular figure set off by a big, shaggy head, whose face was an anomaly to all his other physical aspects: clear cut as a cameo and of a healthy brown. But there was something untamed, bestial about the eyes, and this something came out in the tone of the voice and the words uttered. The song was perfect in construction; the harmony of the rhyme was delightful; but it was wholly sullied by its base idea. While the frenziedly noisy applause was deafening the ear, the door opened for a limping being, leaning on the arm of what had been thought an attendant had not both been grimily and indigently clothed. One glance at the second—he who offered his arm—told him to be a mendicant, or a peddler taken with a canine devotion for the other, who as he limped past Laura, all but startled her into a cry. He had removed a dirty, holely hat, disclosing a huge, lumpy cranium, bald to the ears and almost to the neck, which, like his countenance, was blotchy—the blotches that announce a venereal disease. The body was quite bent and he presented an ensemble so appallingly depraved, so befouled with degradation, so denaturalized with hideous appetites, that a gorilla would seem an angel of purity beside him; a physiognomy that, without actually staring at him, Laura had not supposed possible in man. He could not be described as an animal, for no beast is capable of expressing such pollution and of exhibiting such vice; face and form had a meaning which humanity alone, dragged down to its deepest corruption, can convey.

"Merciful heaven! What—who is that?"

Beaupassant had eyed him steadily, without emotion, as one familiar with the sight.

"Paul Verlaine, if not our greatest, surely our most genuine poet. A genius who wallows in filth and criminality. François Villon was a saint compared to that creature. He hasn't the remotest conception of morality—he's a moral imbecile. There are only four places in the world for him: the brothel and the hospital; the prison and these drinkeries."

His entrance was a signal for a hush of reverence. Many half rose from their seats and bowed. Only to one—to Aristide—did he extend his hand. Place was made for him at the proprietor's table. A few instants after he was seated a tall glass of absinthe was in his hand.

Beaupassant anticipating further questions continued, his eyes on Verlaine: "In all things men of genius are intense and they are rewarded or punished beyond other men. Nature had never stamped vice upon the form and features of an ordinary man as she has on Verlaine. She has made him vice incarnate. His appetites are animalistic, his passions monstrous. He is taken to the hospital every few months and he escapes when only half cured. If he condescends to recite any of his verses we had better leave —for the sake of your ears."

He had scarce uttered the admonition when Verlaine, his absinthe swallowed, limped toward the center table to the clapping of hands. Laura came to her feet instantly and made for the door. The surly porter leered lewdly in withdrawing the bolt.

Where next? Laura suggested a studio or two. She had never been in one. Ah, they were very much alike up here, on Montmatre, Beaupassant observed. The exceptions were like white ravens—heard of in seamstresses romances but never seen. The rule suffered unceasingly not for the poorest comforts of life but for its necessities; ambitions without energy; hopeful without effort; trying to be cheerful under the direst pressure of need. There was nothing pictur-

esque about studios up here. The majority of them were on the Cinquième, around sharp corners, and barely accessible. Once on the final floor, after stumbling along a narrow hall as black as Erebus and floundering through a curtained doorway, one comes abruptly on a door, falls headlong over a little rattan stool or an easel or a box of paints and is picked up in a room eight metres in width by ten in length with a narrow skylight above. It is romantic—that sort of life—for a year or so when one is eighteen or twenty and has a superabundance of health, but the more part end in the manner of Aristide's habitués. You cannot live in semi-starvation amid evil odors and retain your illusions for long.

"But stay, there *is* a studio further up, on the very heights that is worth while. And this is Thursday, Madeline's evening. It may be interesting enough to endure for an hour. Let us go there."

He was about to signal the hackman when Laura stayed his hand with a request; she would like to walk there, for that would bring her in more personal contact with Bohemian Paris than a closed carriage affords. Yes, certainly, but the Bohemian quarters were not all Bohemian, mademoiselle would soon see. The cab was sent on ahead and Laura took the author's arm. No, it was not all Bohemian; some of it was pious; some of it work-a-day, some thievish, criminal, some the haunts of the ultimate dregs of prostitution. They met priests and nuns; artisans—men, women and children prematurely aged by over-work in miasmic conditions—met thieves who slunked and other criminals who glared aggressively; met cocottes young and old who gave men speculative stares; who accosted youths openly, who walked langourously or stood at the corners of the narrow, winding streets, who, when they were successful in arresting passers-by, solicited them avidly. Then there were lorettes hanging on students' arms, the generality laughing impudently. Now and again a young laborer with his sweetheart would pass, he happy in his possession, she bareheaded, a red rose in her hair, gratified to be possessed. They

passed churches, monasteries, convents, where God was worshiped by the lowly; passed dens where future master pieces could be bought for a franc; dens where one's throat would be cut for a sou; passed shops, some bright, others dingy; passed dancing halls and concert halls, all small and nearly all disreputable. It was a kaleidoscope of wealth and penury, vice and virtue, piety and sin, of industry and of crime.

"Montmartre is a world in itself," murmured Laura.

"It is," he confirmed, and a most trying crucible for artistic talent. They who have gone through it successfully are at Fontainebleau, at Suresnes, or St. Cloud or Poissy living like as Meissonier lived. There that is the one exception I have in mind."

He pointed to a somber structure near the summit whose gloom was deepened by two illuminated windows at the top. The windows were open, whence issued the harmony of piano and violin.

"Somerive is there. I know his bow," observed Beaupassant.

The concierge, in recognizing Beaupassant, doffed his hat. Four flights and they were at the destined landing. They waited until the composition was finished, then Beaupassant knocked. A hostess of slight aristocratic form and refinement of feature welcomed Beaupassant. At the introduction she scanned Laura critically and the quick appraisement gratified her so that she threw out both hands, exclaiming in English, "Welcome! Welcome!"

She ushered them into an apartment at once domestic and bohemian, cozy and spacious, artistic and homelike, frugal and prodigal. It was the Bohemianism of a cultured woman. Contrasts met the eye everywhere, from the large room itself—its size was anti-Bohemian—to the satin-covered stool. Near the repulsive little stove with an interminable pipe and hissing kettle was a Flemish cupboard heavily carved, replete with delicate crockery.

The long divan, a contrivance of various packing boxes, was covered with rich rugs. At the back, on a line with a long pine table, a piano. Scattered about,

chairs of various forms and values. The walls were cracked, but they were pure, and their decorations of garlands and miscellaneous ornaments were in faultless taste. Woman's taste was everywhere.

There were six in the room and they were quite all of distinguished appearance. One Laura knew at once. The heavy mane of hair in which gray and black struggled for domination in color; the artist's beard; the absolutely black and resplendent eyes; the slender, somewhat inclined frame—she perceived Alphonse Bidet before he was presented; and when Beaupassant supplemented her name with "une actrice Americaine" Bidet's woman companion greeted Laura with a Gallic fervor that dissolved the rigidly high-bred and hauteur-like countenance into womanly warmth and girlish simplicity. Then Mme. Bidet—it was she—would have it that she herself complete the presentation of Laura to the company. With an arm encircling Laura's waist she murmured low and affectionately, "Monsieur de Somerive," indicating an old, white-haired man, holding a violin caressingly. There was a note of high esteem when she pronounced "Monsieur Godin," sculptor, and "Monsieur Beringer," musician; the one sanguinous, belligerent, heavy of form and hard of feature; the other waspish, attenuated; feminine hands and voice; his small face all but buried by an enormous shock of coarse, Saxon hair. The shade of approval and reproval in Mme. Bidet's voice was dexterously blended in the naming of Monsieur Romaine; the handsome painter with the rakish air stopped puffing a thick cigarette long enough to bow admiringly.

"And now we must be quiet for a few minutes and listen to a Bach air."

Monsieur de Somerive had turned to Madeleine, who was at the piano. A preparatory hush, and the beautiful woman and gentle old man, their countenances uplifted as if to read the score from on high, affused themselves and their listeners with the seraphic composition which, ignoring the precedent of prefectoriness, at once loosened its divine notes in a celestial shower. Oh, how Laura drank of the spirit of that beatific

sound! It banished the serpent with which care and disillusioning experience had bound her heart. She was lifted into the empyrean, where the soul freed from its earthly prison finds the longed-for perfections that the world will ever deny. Madeleine and Somerive had ceased playing, but the charm of the melodic inspiration still held all in spell. Bidet on the divan with his hands clasping his knees, had a far-away look; almost stern. His wife, facing him, seemed in a mute prayer. The sculptor, on a chair against the wall, was lost in infinite meditation. The musician, seated, was bent forward, his head buried in his hands, as if weeping. The painter's demeanor was transformed. The rakishness had given way to an attitude of awe. He stood against the table, his head deeply inclined. The composer's dissolving strain through every vein had passed into the painter's heart and brain. Beaupassant's eyes were fixed upon the floor. He acknowledged he was moved by breaking silence with—

"It is touching, this morceau by Bach."

"And now," he continued, raising his voice to the hostess and the old violinist who were waiting as if to be prompted to the next number, "permit me to suggest a song by Beringer here, his 'l'Amour' for example."

In a round, mellow contralto, Madeleine intoned an amorous air, which changed the aspect of the auditors into a glow of sensuous warmth; it conjured up a warm, moonlight night; a chateau with illuminated windows before which flitted encircled couples waltzing to voluptuous music that was wafted down to the river's bank; where mated youth, seated beneath trees, with eyes upon the moonlight water, listened to the ingratiating orchestra and to the response by a nightingale. The instrumental part of the amatory measure was nothing; a casual accompaniment contributory to a better hearing of the musician in the scene.

They all congratulated Beringer, Bidet enthusiastically, for the hirsute novelist, Laura had noticed, was something of a melomaniac. His extremely dark

eyes, still under the spell of languorous strains, seemed to swim in sentimentality. Beside him Mme. Bidet was calmly contained, sweetly dignified. Of the two one had thought him the woman. He turned to Laura and spoke of music in America. The Americas, he thought, had given the world many valuable executants, more especially the United States, but they had given only one creator of music—the composer of "Il Guarany," Gomes, a Brazilian. There was some promise in a youth of Laura's country, Nevins by name, he believed. He hoped the young man's environments would not sterilize his talent. Still, far be it from him to criticize unmusical atmospheres. Many of his friends had no ears for the art. Flaubert had had no interest in it; it was lost on the Goncourts. Aloza was stone deaf to music; Beaupassant was susceptible to it, but only to the sensuous. Tourgenieff alone among them all had had a true appreciation of the divine art. And he continued to expatiate knowingly and interestingly on music and musicians while the others talked of one thing and another.

The platitude about Nevins and his environment touched Laura disagreeably. She felt as others have felt; no matter how censorious one may be about one's country when at home, it is a keen thrust when abroad to have it critisized by a stranger. She made the observation to Beaupassant when they were again in the street.

"I am no judge of that, for I have always held that patriotism in this age is an anomaly. I have heard France criticised in foreign countries with no emotion or resentment whatever. You will pardon me for expressing the view, but I cannot argue away the thought that patriotism is a savage thought handed down to us by barbarians who fought one another for no other reason than that their noses were not all alike."

They walked in silence until they turned into a broad, sloping street, which at some distance from them was garishly illuminated. Beaupassant stopped as if something had suddenly occurred to him. "My

dear Miss Darnby, I want to make a suggestion. I suggest that we do not go to the Moulin Noir. It is not because I think you would find it immoral, but that it is uninteresting and, worse still, very vulgar. In the center there is a large platform for professional dancers, male and female. On the sides drinking tables infested by dancers and women, whose business it is to make men consume as much liquor as they can induce them to buy. In a few side alleys—so-called groves—you may chance upon a disgusting scene or two or may have your pocket picked. It is all very dull and hopelessly cheap; a place for provincial people and for foreigners who suppose that Parisian manners and characteristics are exemplified there."

"Manners and characteristics? I did not know that there were people so ignorant as to expect such a thing."

"It is so, nevertheless. The only interesting thing about the place is the stranger and his delusion. In the Moulin Noir the man from the interior meets the man from abroad. The fellow from Bezrere who has had trouble with his wife meets the Norwegian nobleman, Marquis de Gondremarck. A bourgeois family from Bavaria rubs elbows in the gravelled mall with a group of Japanese; you may see a Russian prince by the side of a hardware merchant from Liseaux; see Slovaks, Servians, Poles, Portuguese, Spanish and English—anybody save Parisians. If by chance one of us strays into the place, he dashes out directly he has gone around that circle where it is pretended the dancing is not professional. A mall of artificial scenery; palms of zinc; a gaping crowd from all quarters of the globe; professional dancers; mechanical grottoes; an old sink transformed into a fountain; an old, second cook disguised as a fortune teller; and, on gala nights, a couple of English boxers, who break each other's noses. It is a scheme especially arranged to lure as many francs as possible from the pockets of foreigners who are made to believe they are seeing a fine specimen of Parisian gaiety and wickedness. For a franc the foreigner can see

six salaried high kickers, who are supposed to represent Parisian folly; a dozen dissolute women who pass for Parisian grace and fascination; in the side alleys a disgusting scene or two and everywhere a lot of persons who are yawning hard enough to dislocate their jaws; Brazilians who come via Bordeaux; Americans landed at Havre; Germans from the Northern railway depot; Austrians brought here by the Eastern line; Turks who come up the Danube; Spaniards from Old Castile, and here and there a low-paid clerk who mounted an omnibus near some obscure street on the left bank of the river. All these people eye one another with curiosity; every foreigner thinks his neighbor a Parisian and for that reason, you see, the Moulin Noir is so thoroughly Parisian. There really is nothing less Parisian than these places. Paris is synonymous with grace, wit, taste; there is nothing of this at the Moulin Noir; grace is represented by a dozen hardened prostitutes who prowl around the orchestra; by a few young dancers who change their gowns for dancing purposes at the office just as an actress "makes up" in her dressing room before going on; wit by a lot of pickpockets; while taste is shown in the zinc palms and the Chinese lanterns. The foreigner who arrives in Paris hurriedly takes a bath, jumps into a cab and gets out at the Moulin Noir, where he thinks he will get a large sample of Paris in a night. The three men wearing white ties at the box office offer the first example of Parisian distinction; the leafy mall, painted on canvas, Parisian art; the orchestra playing a silly composition is Parisian music; a third rate cocotte, who lifts up her skirts, is representative of the Parisian dance; the young man who kicks up his legs in unison with the female dancer's vulgar audacities and to whom the management has entrusted a dress suit, ready made, impersonates the youth of Paris. To the average foreigner, places like the Moulin Noir are symbolic of Paris life. Oftener than not he goes home in a week positively convinced that for a few francs he has seen Paris thoroughly. If he is a writer the Moulin Noir experience warrants him to write two

or three volumes on Parisian morals and the press of his country in reviewing his book declares that he has made a profound study of French morality—or immorality."

"I certainly shall defer to your suggestion—and I thank you for making it. Now let me make one: let us return to the hotel at once and on the way back tell me about the Bidets."

"Everybody adores Mme. Bidet," he answered after directing the driver,—"but the feeling is not so unanimous regarding Bidet. He is highly complex, even for an author. Flaubert once called him, in confidential undertone, a feline fellow. You will overlook the comparison, I know; he is feminine in his envy. The enormous success of Aloza's 'Anna' threw him into an envious rage for a week, though Aloza is his best friend. Tourgenieff, who is deeply penetrating, distrusts him and at bottom dislikes him. Edmond de Goncourt says he lacks singleness of purpose. He is very vain, the vanity of a Southerner. I am prejudiced against men who are dosed with personal sentimentality, and Bidet has all the faults and virtues that come from that trait. He has an extremely nervous organization, has all the nerves and sensibilities and susceptibilities of a woman—and also her contradictions and amazing mutabilities. He likes Germans because they are strong, heavy and victorious—a woman's secret adoration for her opposite. Finally he has the delicate perfidy and ingratitude of a woman. He will not hesitate to put a sacred secret imparted by a friend into his books. His 'Mogul' is a perfidious volume filled with his ingratitude and violations of confidences. His greatest benefactors, from the Duc de Morny down, are traduced and vilified. He does not do these things wantonly. He does them unconsciously; or, better, according to his nature; the unscrupulousness of a writer who thinks all material (friend or foe) is his prey. The real man in the Bidet ménage is Mme. Bidet."

The open carriage moved slowly. There were innumerable vehicles ahead, bunched closely, compelling

slackened pace. On Laura's side was a long drinkery, glittering with crude lights, and beneath the garish illuminations, at small round, marble-top tables, a mass of miscellaneous and for the most part pusillanimous humanity. There were young men and old. And the young were as bald as the old. It was Bohemianism of a more energetic character than that at Aristides; an open air Bohemianism against the cave kind at the other place. The air of abandon was the same in both. But what quickly arrested Laura's attention to the exclusion of the rest were the women. In the brief glances which the slowly moving cab permitted she noticed the types were several; many were young and these all singularly attractive; the forms svelt, the faces of beautiful strength. The partial or wholly faded predominated, however, and they imparted a momentary wave of depression to Laura; they were so palpably rouged, their struggle with encroaching age so futile and frantic.

"What place is this?"

"Brasserie des Hirondelles, a rendezvous for artists, students and failures—and their mistresses. You are interested in the women, I see. All models, actual or ancient. Their heads are as striking as their sobriquets, though their piquant appellations insists upon nobility. They all are de somebody or countess so and so. Heaven only knows where they come from. A few, originally, had aspirations; they wished to be artists or actresses; they failed for want of talent or perseverance or morality. But the mass is made up of cocottes. They pass from hand to hand and from each "friend" they absorb a little artistic erudition. They talk well; they have opinions—second hand—about everything. They are realists and impressionists and romanticists, catholic and protestants, Jewesses and atheists by turns—according to the lover of the week or day. They all smoke as well as drink. It's bad for them and worse for their men. How many promising fellows have I known who began coming here once a week! then twice; then every night and finally made it their home—a home of guzzled beer and sipped absinthe; of hurrying waiters; of

heated discussions; no, not discussions, but of vociferations; shouts, cries; gesticulating arms, and shaking manes—you notice the men are all long-haired, when they have any. They come here to intoxicate themselves with wild ideas as well as with brutal beverages. They form collaborations, outline masterpieces of art and literature—which are not started even—hypnotize themselves and forget that they are growing older and the brasserie odious. They end by finding it impossible to do anything. Bohemianism in Mürger's sense and as depicted by him is a lie, the most dangerous falsehood ever perpetrated in our literature; it is a delusion that has given young men a basis of quicksand for a beginning; it has vitiated the will, sapped the energy and poisoned the blood and mind of myriads of geniuses."

They had now reached the boulevards, which were ablaze. The shops cast floods of brilliant light half across the streets, and encircled the crowd in a golden haze. The illuminated Kiosques, extending in two interminable rows and resembling enormous Chinese lanterns, gave to the street the fantastic and childlike aspect of an Oriental fête. The flood of light, the thousands of luminous points shining through the trees; the flitting carriage lights that seemed like myriads of fire flies; the purple lamps of the omnibuses, the hundred thousand illuminated windows, these theatrical splendors produced an indescribable impression on Laura. It seemed like an immense display of fireworks, which if suddenly extinguished would leave the city buried in smoke.

Beaupassant said nothing until they reached the Madeleine, when his words told that the trend of his thought had veered completely.

"I'm thinking what must be the social freedom of women in your country. I have always known that young men and women, especially when engaged, go about everywhere unescorted. And it seems that married women have the same privilege; that is, they are permitted to be accompanied by their male friends, in the absence of their husbands. It seems singular to

the French mind. Here such a thing would be seriously compromising."

"Well, it is quite regular with us provided the husband approves of it."

"And are there no accidents?" This with derisive glitter in the eye.

"Not as many as with you."

"And it is known—your husband and friends know—that I am your friend, philosopher and guide, as your Dr. Johnson expresses it?"

"My husband knows. I have written him."

"And your friends will know through your friend, the American journalist here."

Laura had quite forgotten Woodlock. What had he cabled his paper? What written? She realized that to have been taken up by Beaupassant and introduced to the artistic circles of Paris implied at home an enhancement of personal prestige and professional reputation—if tactfully presented to American readers. Otherwise—they were near the hotel and Beaupassant took her hand with "allow me." He kissed it—for the first time since they had met.

Laura was sufficiently versed in French customs to know that the kissing of the hand was a convention; but being belated on Beaupassant's part and coming with the discussion of American manners, it provoked that malaise when women are uncertain whether they should feel insulted, flattered or complimented. The ruffled sensation vanished as Mrs. Quincy—who had waited for Laura—called attention to a package of letters on the table. The subtle perplexities of the higher world—the world of letters, of elegance, of higher thought—disappeared in the ruder cares of domestic intimacies, in the homely anxieties of her own country. The short stay in Paris had made her quite oblivious to Ross, her parents, her American intimates and to Gars—her profession.

There was a letter from Gars; this reminded her that she was an actress aspiring to the best which her profession affords in America. There were several from Ross—written one each day from the moment of

her departure to the sailing of the next steamer; they produced mingling emotions of an antithetical character. Did she regret her marriage? Should she be grateful? Knowing the intellectual world as she now knew it had she married Ross—Ross entirely practical and mentally quite elemental? And one from her mother—from that primitive form of life in Missouri. For a moment her retrospective vision was profoundly tragic, embracing the tragedy of the soul at war with conditions and the more awful spectacle of human character, capable of good, of brilliancy even, defeated by the ox-like if not ignoble association and in so many instances finally abandoned to its baser instincts. And the more sensitized the man or woman who succumbs at last to the cerements of miserable environments, the deeper is his or her debasement. After these thoughts had passed over her brain she rejoiced that she had married Ross. In her heart she thanked him, she was grateful to him for surrounding her with that which she now knew was best for the more part of women—intelligent luxury and refinement. The thankfulness, the gratitude melted momentarily as Darnby leaped to her mind; an incandescent hate, an inflamed resentment possessed her. Then Protony; he was quite objective now. He evoked pity, admiration and resentment too fugitive and diaphanous for definition; but through all there was a well-defined contempt which every womanly woman feels for men who are evasive, hesitative, compliant, deferential, melancholy and completely ineffective.

From members of her own profession—from the actors and actresses to whom she had been "My dear" —not a line. They were an insincere and a self-centered lot, these butterflies.

The letters read, she sat near the window pensive. It was a strange contrast; here was glorious Paris, with its diadem, the Champs Elysée (symbolic of a realized dream) in front of her; there, on a table, were communications which were witnesses of ties with a mean past and perhaps an indifferent future. Oh, would that Paris and the ideals and enjoyments which it had

inspired could be perpetuated! But she was sure of a few days more; she would live those days to the very seconds. And, meanwhile, no more thoughts of the past or of a future whose only inviting glance was an ambition that had been discouraged by the impossibility of attaining the perfection she had seen in French theatres. She bade Mrs. Quincy to cast the letters in a trunk—she would sever the bonds for a few days at least—and then retired, her mind, just before slumber supervened, in a confusion of cloudy casuistry with regard to Beaupassant and hazy anticipations of a visit to Aloza at Medan.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SOULS OF PARIS.

For a while the route followed the Seine, where the river is dotted with charming islands; then swerves to cross the pretty village of Villaines; there redescends gently, and finally penetrates the country where lives the author with the penetrating look.

An ancient and unique church, flanked by two turrets, first appeared to the left. A few steps further and a passing peasant pointed out the door of the novelist. Before ringing, Beaupassant suggested that Laura look at the residence. A large building, square and high. It appeared to have given birth—after the manner of the fable of the mountain and the mouse—to a little house, very white, couched at the foot of the big edifice. The small one, Beaupassant explained, was the original home, built by a former proprietor. The other had been constructed by Aloza.

They rang. A massive dog—a cross breed of St. Bernard and Newfoundland—barked so ferociously that Laura stepped back. But a servant ran forward and before opening directed, "Be quiet, Bertrand". She greeted Beaupassant with the gentle respect and polite familiarity that Laura had observed to be the rule among French domestics. Beaupassant had merely to say "M'lle Darnby" for Laura to be greeted with a sweet smile and a respectful bow. They followed her from the old to the new building, where they ascended a pair of stairs to the second floor. In a few moments in following the servant, Laura, who had not thought of it before, asked herself what manner of man she expected to see. She had seen a bust picture of him in magazines and newspapers, but every cut had been

different from the other; they were confusing and made for no adequate conception of the writer whose sonorous name had already at that time resounded in all quarters of the world to the invincible hate of some, the indignation real or feigned of others, to the envy of certain fellow writers, the deep respect of an army of readers and to the admiration of hosts of people. In her fancy she saw a bearded giant, of terrifying aspect, with a resounding voice far from agreeable.

The door opened, disclosing an immense apartment which was lighted by Venetian windows facing a sweeping landscape. Ancient tapestries covered the walls; to the left, a monumental fireplace, flanked by statuettes. A big table crowded with books, manuscripts and newspapers occupied, or, rather monopolized the middle of the room in such a way as to attract attention to the momentary exclusion of the man upon an oriental divan where at least twenty men could have slept.

As they entered the man sat tailor wise. A book with the leaves thumbed lay at his side. In his right hand he fumbled an ivory paper knife whose tip he had contemplated with one eye, in closing the other, with the obstinate squint of a myope. He slid down directly he recognized Beaupassant, advanced quickly and shook hands heartily. He bowed rather formally to Laura, and observed, again facing Beaupassant: "You the first, and on time? You who are always late when you come at all? Ah, perhaps madamoiselle is to be credited with your promptness."

Whilst he was speaking Laura examined him: of medium height; of the comfortable circumference of a contented bourgeois. His head, very like those that are found in the Italian portraits of the sixteenth centurn, without being handsome in the plastic sense, presented a cogent example of strength and intelligence. Thick and short hair stood out upon a highly developed brow. His straight nose was as if suddenly arrested in its growth by the stroke of a chisel just above the upper lip, which was covered by a black, heavy mustache. The entire chin was of a beard clipped very

close. The black eyes shot out as if they were about to discharge a volley of ironical and penetrating ammunition. Laura felt that back of these orbs was a highly active mind that understood men, was not misled by their words, interpreted their gestures, denuded their souls. This round and strong head was in consonance with the short and resonant name of three bounding syllables and three ringing vowels.

A woman entered. She was introduced to Laura as Mrs. Aloza. She was tall as Aloza was short, thin as he was stout, characterless in mien and features as he was vivid with strength and intellectual vivacity; a faithful mate and no more—one who looked to the creature comforts of her forceful husband. Then entered the Bidets, both of whom greeted Laura warmly. Mme. Bidet exclaiming: "Ah, there is our brilliant brunnette!" Upon their heels came two men obviously painters and clearly brothers. They were presented as the Messieurs Guillemet. Another artist whom Aloza fairly embraced and whom he introduced in a paternal way followed. He was Monsieur Monet; a strong face, hard and determined. Then came the M. M. Hansmann, Henrique, Creux, Robin and Alexique. The first made a hybrid impression on Laura; it was a mixture of repulsion and attraction. He might have been anything from a clerk to an abbé. His eyes were restive and changed constantly in expression. He had a hungry look which was animalistic and philosophically wistful by turns. Henrique and Robin were Frenchmen as they are met on the street—*ces messieurs qui passe.* Creux had the air of a soured hermit, Alexique that of a despondent watch dog.

Mme. Aloza suggested that they go into the dining room. Aloza interposed: "Let us wait. Perhaps the ancient will come after all."

The ancient did come presently. He stooped decidedly, walked undecidedly like an invalid soldier. The simile was emphasized by the white military mustache, the florid face. His reception was that of a retired general by young soldiers; enthusiasm blended with deference. Beaupassant made Laura known to

him as "An American actress distinguished." He to her as Emile de Boncourse.

The ancient's arrival was a signal to repair to the dining room. As was the library and other apartments through which they passed, the hall in which they were to have dinner was decidedly unrealistic and pronouncedly romantic. From it Laura had a full view of the colossal ribbon called the Seine.

Aloza took one end of the oblong table, Boncourse the other. Laura was placed near Boncourse's end, between him and Beaupassant and directly opposite Hanseman. Henri Rochefort was the subject of comment as they took their sats. To-day's article in *L'Intransigeant* Boncourse vowed would again send him into exile. The attack on the ministry was the most vicious that had appeared since the commune. At heart Rochefort was a communist; he—

"Pardon," Bidet interrupted. "At heart Rochefort is a dead literary ambition, the victim of a perverted talent. As a young man Rochefort wished to be an author. He wrote farces which were very mediocre, dramatic critiques which were virile and original. In the same office with him was a violently opinionated youth, the butt of the staff's sarcasm, who was continually denouncing men high in office. One day Rochefort, in a spirit of jest, made a transcript of these ravings and sent it to an obscure weekly. To the astonishment of Rochefort and the editor, the disconnected vaporings were the talk of the boulevard for a whole evening. The editor demanded more of the same nature and from that day to this Rochefort has been writing the inanities which were begun in a joke. At first, Rochefort threw off the copy as though it were a bit of humorous hack work; then it became a habit; now it is a vice. At the beginning they were facetious and well written; to-day the paragraphs are the incoherencies of a madman. Rochefort was a disappointed author without convictions, political or otherwise. No matter what the government—monarchical, Republican, Communistic—he would revile it in a style that had changed from caustic to foul."

"What do you think of Rochefort?" was asked of Boncourse.

"I cannot be exact until I have finished with this most excellent dinner. It is after dinner that I get my ideas. With me a full stomach is synonymous with a head full of thoughts. I am like those plants whose leaves at once exude the water poured at the base."

This was a hint to lower the tone of talk to brief commonplaces until the finger bowls were presented, for Boncourse, Laura perceived, was the nestor of these gatherings. She paid little heed to the loose, choppy remarks passed to and fro, but she felt a sensation of being in an atmosphere of mental exhileration. The air was psychologically electric. She now felt herself visibly and acutely alive. She found all her faculties keenly alert; found herself thinking faster and clearer but without fatigue. It was as if respiration were effortless and energy unconscious of exertion. Some strong force, universal in its operation, had manifestly so exalted the spirit of the Parisians, centered and focused in its representation of art, as to produce on every hand that phenomenon which some one tried to characterize in declaring that "the last perfection of our qualities is when their activity, without ceasing to be sure and earnest, becomes a sport."

"The only sane quality possessed of Rochefort," began Boncourse in an oracular strain, as he put down his serviette, "is his innate dislike of the Jews. That trait is sincere. He recognizes that they are the evil genius of humanity in that they are making money the supreme test of worldly power and influence."

Aloza's head shot up as if touched by an electric shock. His look of indignant astonishment denoted a total disappearance of deference to his white-haired friend. "Boncourse, I always knew you had a vague prejudice against the Bourse and commercialism, but I am amazed to find that you have been infected by the stupid attempt of a few discredited politicians to make a little cheap capital by resurrecting a superstition as shameful as it is barbarous."

Aloza's vehemence evidently was new to Boncourse, who, unaccustomed to such an emphatic rebuttal, was dislodged from complacency: "Why, Aloza, you surprise me. Since when have you become a champion of money lenders, you who only recently have emerged from the abject misery which the lack of money breeds?"

"The Jews had nothing to do with my poverty. I was poor because I was refused a hearing, and the very class that is endorsing this puerile agitation of discredited politicians—the class that stands for every reactionary movement, for progressive adversity—did more to retard my recognition than the critics who affected to despise my work. What, after all, is there against the Jews? What have they done? Some people say they find Jews insufferable, that they cannot shake hands with them without a feeling of repugnance. That I suppose, is a physical antipathy, the repulsion of one race for another, the aversion of the Caucasian for the Mongolian, the copper-colored barbarian for the black heathen. I do not know if in this repugnance there does not enter the old hate for the Jew who is ignorantly accused of having crucified the Christ. However, physical repulsion is a good reason, indeed the only reason, for there is nothing to be said to people who tell you 'I think they are hateful because I find them hateful; because the very sight of their nose exasperates me; because my flesh revolts at finding them different and contrary to myself.' But this hostility of one race for another will never do. We might as well go back to the depths of the forest, begin again the barbarous warfare of tribe against tribe and devour one another because we haven't got the same cry or because the hairs on our bodies are not of the same color. The essential meaning of civilization is the extinction of the savage instinct. In the course of centuries the lesson which the history of humanity teaches is that of mutual tolerance; so obvious is this that every man of progress hopes for a universal fraternity ultimately. Therefore, to bite and to hate in our time because one man's head is not shaped

exactly like another's is the beginning of a monstrous madness. The Jews, I know are accused of being a nation within a nation, of living apart, of being, as it were, an international sect, without a country, capable some day if sufficiently strong and successful of capturing the world. The Jews in marrying among themselves are really a large family, with ties tightly drawn amid the widening bands of modern times; they sustain one another, encourage each other, and display in their isolation an irresistible force and a spirit of gradual conquest that is extraordinary; above all, they are a practical and shrewd race; they are acquisitive; they have an especial talent for business, which in less than a century has put in their hands enormous fortunes and which appears to assure them the kingdom at a time when money shall be king. All this is true, but who is responsible? The Jews as they exist to-day are as we have made them: the result of our eighteen hundred years of idiotic persecution. They have been herded in infamous ghetti, like lepers, so that it is not at all astonishing that they have lived apart, have preserved their traditions, have tightened family ties, have remained like the conquered among the conquerors. They have been beaten, abused, have been subjected to all manner of judicial outrages and physical violences; it is not surprising, then that they harbor, though unconsciously, the hope of revenge, of being irresistible, of becoming in turn, conquerors. Above all, the world disdainfully left the domain of money to them, forcing them to be traffickers and usurers; it is not surprising then that when the reign of brutal might had given way to the reign of intelligence and labor the Jews were found to be masters of money, their brains developed, exercised by centuries of experience and thoroughly equipped for the strife in the new social war."

"And now terrified by the result of blind persecution, frightened at beholding what the fanaticism of the middle ages has made of the Jews, you can conceive of nothing better than to turn back a thousand years, resume the persecutions, preach anew the holy

war so that the Jews may be hounded, despoiled, herded together as before; filled with the old hatred and treated like slaves. This certainly is a very fine conception of civilization, a lovely view of social order. Seriously, is it possible that you with your countless millions of Gentiles call for the police to protect you against a handful of Jews? I really cannot compliment you upon your bravery. The conditions of the battle are very fair. Why not be as intelligent and as clever as the Jews in the commercial field. While I was around the Stock Exchange gathering material for my novel, 'L'Argent,' a Gentile banker in speaking of the Jews said to me: 'They are too smart for us; they overreach us in everything.' If that were so it would be very humiliating. But why should it be true? To be gifted is well enough, but work and fair intelligence are better than mere gifts. The field is free, and though the Jews have had several centuries of training in money matters there is nothing to do but to emulate them, to adopt their methods, beat them with their own weapons. That is the only way. To abuse them is worse than futile—it is an acknowledgment of your own weakness. Vanquish them by being their superior in business. Nothing is more simple. It is the law of life. What proud satisfaction it must be to them to hear your cries of distress! Think of it, though only an infinitesimal minority they compel tremendous defensive operations. Every morning you blaze away at them, you sound the call to arms as if your fort were in danger of capture. In listening to you one would think it were absolutely necessary to re-establish the ghetto, with its Rue des Juifs, to be barred at night with chains; and this quarantine arrangement in our free cities would be a charming arrangement, would it not? I can well understand that they are not at all disturbed, that they continue to be supreme in the world of finance; for abuse and injustice are the legendary arrow which turns to pierce the eye of the malevolent archer. Continue to persecute them if you want them to continue to be your superiors."

"Persecution! Is it possible that you are still at that primitive stage? You still imagine that you can circumvent people by persecuting them? Let me assure you that it is quite the contrary; nothing has furthered the cause quite so effectively as the blood of martyrs. If there are still Jews in the world, the fault is yours. They had disappeared, had been absorbed, had they not been forced to defend themselves, to live together, forced to cling to their traditions. Even to-day their greatest power proceeds from the fact that you render that power more effective by exaggerating it. In the end danger is created by loudly acknowledging that it exists. By showing the people a scarecrow, a real monster is created. If you cease to agitate the question it will no longer exist. The day the Jew becomes an ordinary man like ourselves he will be our brother.

"Adopt a different course. Open your arms. Make the law of equality real by making it social. Welcome the Jew everywhere that you may absorb him and make him an equal in your social order. Enrich yourselves with his qualities, for he has many. Make an end of this barbarous war of races by an absorption of a race. Encourage intermarriages, and leave to the children the task of reconciling the fathers. This, and only this, is what is meant by unity, humanity and charity. Anti-Semitism in a country where it has any real importance is either a political weapon or the result of a serious economic situation. But in France, where it is not true—as we have been told—that the Jews are the money power, anti-semitism is an absolute fallacy. To give the propaganda the appearance of entity the Rothchilds, by an absurd theory of chronology, have been connected with Judas, and in them is pursued and delivered the being who delivered the Son of God. And I may add that the craving for notoriety has no small part in the attempt to inflame the public, an attempt that happily has ended in failure. Yes, a happy failure, when you remember the months of abuse, of defamation; when you recall that every day the Jews have been denounced as

thieves and assasins; remember that whenever a Christian has protested he has been stamped a Jew—the entire Jewish world hunted, insulted, vilified. However, the movement has resolved itself in nothing but noise, in vile epithets, in low passions. The people of France have certainly shown wisdom, honesty, and goodness in not listening to the daily call for a civil war, in preserving their sanity amidst these abominable incitements in which there has been a daily howl for the blood of the Jews. It is no longer a priest upon which certain journals breakfast, but upon a Jew, the largest and fattest that can be found. A breakfast as meager as the old one and equally foolish. And in all this there remains only the dregs of drudgery, a task than which there is none more senseless and more execrable. The extraordinary part of it is that the agitators assume to be doing something reasonable and necessary. The poor fools, how I pity them, if they are sincere. What a reputation they are making for themselves! A mass of errors, of falsehoods, of furious envies, of lunacies—these are piling up daily. A critic who descends to this slough recoils in horror in seeing that there is nothing but religious bigotry and unbalanced mentality. The mob inciters will be pilloried by history. I must confess that I am amazed at such a reversion to fanaticism; amazed that such a tentative step toward a religious war should have been taken in our time, in our magnificent Paris, amidst enlightened Frenchmen. And this is a day of democracy, of universal tolerance, when everywhere there is a general manifestation in favor of equality, of fraternity and of justice! We were about to efface national border lines, were dreaming of one nationality for all peoples; had called a congress of religions so that the ministers of all beliefs might embrace each other, so that we might be made one by the common tie of humanity. But here is a handful of madmen, of imbeciles, or of unscrupulous adventurers who every morning command us 'to kill the Jews;' 'devour the Jews;' 'massacre them;' 'exterminate them;' 'let us return to the days

of quartering and dragonnading.' A very timely moment for such actions! Nothing would be more idiotic were it not so abominable."

"That certain number of Jews possess enormous wealth there can be no question. But the same is true of Catholics and Protestants. To exploit the popular protest against immense riches by giving them an aspect of religious prejudice and above all to throw the Jew in the stew brewed by improvidence under the pretext that he alone represents capital is a social hypocrisy and a lie that should be denounced. If some day the law of labor be formulated according to the dictates of truth—and therefore for the welfare of all—it will transform humanity; whether one be a Jew or a Gentile there will be no distinctions, for responsibilities will be equal and rights and duties the same. We should all strive for a union of the human race if we wish to live a genuine life, and maintain a hopeful heart. The union of humanity! The signal is indistinct as yet, but it will become clearer and clearer and at last reach the peoples of all nations, the peoples who are thirsting for truth, justice and peace. Let us extinguish hate; let us strive to make all races one happy family. Granted that it will take thousands of years; let us, nevertheless, have sufficient faith in its ultimate realization by appreciating each other to-day as much as the imperfections of our social order will permit."

Beaupassant and Alexique nodded approval. The others made no sign; they did not care to commit themselves for Aloza or against Boncourse. Mme. Bidet made a deft move to turn the subject: "Whatever the Jews may be I quite admire Jewesses. They are among my best friends. They are artistic and impressionable, sympathetic and susceptible to culture. They are examples of womanly virtue."

"Womanly virtue?" took up Boncourse grimly—the mortification produced by Aloza's rejoinder was an audible note in his tone:—"that is a relative quantity. There are women who have the virtue of a Zoöphyte, who are passionless, without feeling;

who regard virtue as so much capital that must not be impaired without a material equivalent—a husband or some other worldly advantage. The others, who are more finely organized, who have a perception of the dignity, the moral beauty which chastity confers, waive virtue the instant their emotions are involved. I am convined nor virtue nor honor nor purity can prevent a woman from being a women, can shield her from the caprices and the temptations of her sex."

"The judgment of an inveterate bachelor who has never never known a real woman, never known pure love," mumured Mme. Bidet, as if to herself.

"Pure love," he rejoined, in no way abashed by her sotto voce retort. "That is an irreconcilable paradox. There can be no such thing between man and woman. There is an affection between mother and son, father and daughter, sister and brother, but pure love. It is impossible! The ultimate manifestation of love is impure. Hence the absurdity of the phrase, 'The purifying influence of woman's love.' A woman makes for refinement, not for purity. And love itself, as it is understood among you to-day, is no longer the healthful, the almost hygienic love of the good old days. You have heaped upon woman, you have made her responsible for, all your ideals, all your aspirations. She has become for you the nest and the altar of all sorts of acute and poignant and delirious sensations. In her and through her you would satisfy the frenzied and insatiable longings and ambitions within you. You no longer know how to be happy in a simple way with a woman."

"We wish to give her a chance to come into her own; we wish to make her our equal in everything," ventured Hansmann.

"By that you mean you would have her your superior. Confer upon her the rights of man and the privileges of woman. But why not return to the sensible idea of our fathers and make her your companion? In life there must be a male and a female. Either you must remain male or become female and put woman in your place. If woman has a grievance for

having been born a woman, she should blame nature, not society. By effacing yourself and putting woman foremost you disorganize the social system. You could give woman every possible power, put her in public offices, clothe her with the highest authority and she still would be a woman—ruled by her emotions, defective in judgment."

"Because man from the first warped her judgment by withholding opportunities to exercise it; her emotions are uncontrolled because her other faculties have been repressed by man's law." It was Hansmann who said it, slowly but distinctly.

"Oh, that is your view, is it "? Boncourse eyed him with a look of mingled malignity and disdain. Then, turning to the others as if he were examining a patient for the benefit of the students in a clinic: "Now, you see, he is become a woman suffragist. Everything in quick succession with him. He will be all things in turn. Yesterday he was a realist more accurate and minute than Aloza here; to-morrow he will be a monk, will wish to join the Trappists. Young man, he again faced Hansmann—"it were well for you to remember that all earnest observers are at bottom sad and necessarily so. They are students of life. They are not actors but spectators of life. They take nothing that is deceptive or that intoxicates. Their normal state is melancholy serenity. You are swayed by what you see. That will never do. If you want to be somebody, if you wish to do something of prominence, keep yourself in hand—and keep away from the cafés and political discussions."

"Exactly," emphasized Creux maliciously, and as if to disprove the thrust. "Aloza, early in my career, told me to work, work. It is all there. Keep away from the cafés and get Murger's 'Vie de Bohème' out of your head. Don't waste a minute. Don't think of pleasure until you have made a name; and it is only in front of your easel that you will make a name."

"Admirable advice," took up Sartost, "but like all admirable things it has its defects—and its day. You, yourself,"—looking at Aloza—"I know are not

as convinced of the efficacy of continuous application as you were, say, ten years ago. As a basis for work there must be palpable talent, urging, incentive talent. One may have immense energy, enthusiasm even, which will hold a student in his workshop day and night, but of what avail if he be not gifted? I grant you that powerful inclination together with indomitable industry, will produce cerain results, but they will be inferior if the gift be lacking. It is a dangerous fallacy, that mere work will produce masterpieces. It is my observation that the higher the genius the less effort is required for its manifestation."

"What do you mean by genius? Are not patience and determination genius?" Paul Alexis asked as if in defense of Aloza.

"By no means. I should say they are the negative of what the term implies. A genius does things with facility, without effort, does them indeed with almost unconscious inevitability. How would you define it, Beaupassant?"

"I should define a genius one who apprehends something of that which we call a sixth sense."

"By a sixth sense I think you mean a complete imagination. All artists have imaginations, but among the few who are really great the imagination is complete. That was Tourgenieff's definition," added Bidet.

"Renan has it but has never exercised it," ventured Robin.

"Renan would have many transcendant qualities if he cared for them. But Renan lacks not only initiative, he wants a sense of affirmation. He is equivocation incarnate, a defect women cannot forgive," was Mme. Bidet's conviction.

"Yes, in conversation he agrees with everybody. To me he will say yes, to Creux no, when I say yes and Creux says no," affirmed Henrique.

"And yet he is not insincere," interposed Boncourse, "because he sees all sides of all things. That is why he cannot be affirmative. He is your opposite, Aloza. You see one side only and therein lies your

strength, your invincible conviction. You have no trouble in finding truth."

"If Renan sees so many sides he should select one of many, the best," rejoined Aloza.

"Ah, what is the best? In this Paris of yours it is difficult to decide. The very air is charged with theories—all plausible—and subtleties." The sentiment was voiced with a despairing sigh by the big Guillemet, from whom it seemed incongruous.

"I don't find it so. My subjects and forms are very clear to me," returned Robin positively.

"You, of course you don't. You are to sculpture what Aloza is to letters," answered Mme. Bidet equally positive. "The observation is not original. I read it in the Figaro to-day. Lazarre said it."

"What pleasure does Lemaitre find in calling Lazarre a Prussian Jew? There is no wit in that even if it were true," declared Hansmann.

"In default of other abuse I suppose," responded Robin. "But it may give Lemaitre a little personal satisfaction. At heart he's a Jew hater and in proclivities a Jew baiter. If he ever enters politics he will show himself a monarchist. He professes progress in the arts, but I doubt his sincerity. A reactionary in politics and a radical in literature—they do not coincide."

"I differ from you about Lemaitre's prejudice against the Jews," objected Creux. "Read his praises of Bernhardt; and he was the first to welcome a revival of Offenbach. Look at his brilliant review of 'Le Belle Hélène'—a startling innovation for the '*Journal des Débats*'."

"What else could he say?" queried Boncourse calmly. "He discovered neither Bernhardt nor Offenbach. Bernhardt had been recognized by Sarcy and Offenbach was dead before Lemaitre came to Paris. Both were world famous before Lemaitre wrote a line of criticism. Do you know"—he swerved—"I have always thought that Offenbach is the Aristophanes of music."

"Lazarre told me the other day he was writing a

biographical sketch of Offenbach for Figaro," added Alexis. "He and Melhac were Offenbach's house mates during the summer months. He says that the last six years of Offenbach's life the composer suffered the torture which made Heine's final years a prolonged agony —and for the same reason. But there was a difference. Offenbach's iron will kept him out of bed, enabled him to work until death extinguished the last flickering light in his emaciated body. He died like Meyerbeer, with stylus in hand (sur la brèche).

"His was an extraordinary gift. The masters in music as well as the crowd revelled in his compositions. Gounod is an exception. I think Gounod does not approve because of the librettos. Delibes, Massenet, Massé and Saint-Saens, all have told me they love Offenbach's scores. Delibes says that in his time he had not missed an Offenbach premier."

"But I'm afraid," continued Bidet, "that Delibes' strength is failing. I saw him on Monday. He looked as if a mortal disease had seized him. These latter days (de nos jours) musicians live a tense life; all emotion; very little calm, although Saint-Saens reimburses nature by a regularity of physical exercise—he, the athlete, who needs it less."

"But Massenet escapes Paris and its enervating indulgences. He dashes to Africa and Asia now and again, as you did several times," said Mme. Bidet to her husband, quite directly.

"Which did not prevent me from returning immediately when word reached me that the Odéon had accepted my first play. Heavens! what emotions I felt in that return from Algiers. I had been there one day only when the news reached me. I forgot my illness, my pecuniary distress, everything. Those were the days of youth, of enthusiasm. Beaupassant, I wonder you've never tried a play, you who like the theatre."

"I have tried; I have two plays, one in verse, the other in prose. I have not submitted them. There is no hurry. I hope to persuade Mademoiselle (turning to Laura) to become French and appear in my plays."

Everybody applauded. Yes, one must make con-

verts; France needs women as well as men. Talents are more useful to a nation than soldiers. They would not let Madamoiselle return to America. She must become French. They would speak to Perrin and insist that she be given a chance at the Theatre Française. If not there, then at the Odéon or the Gymnase. These only half-earnest and entirely jovial protestations were flattering nevertheless and embarrassing; so when Boncourse questioned her about the stage of her own country she was glad to be drawn from her confusion. They were astonished that the States had so few good playwrights, that the American theatre drew so largely on France, England and Germany for plays. She created amazement and amusement in telling that French and German plays were calmly appropriated without a suggestion of credit by American adapters, who confidently claimed authorship by simply changing the names of the characters and transferring the scene of action from Berlin and Paris to New York. The author's interest deepened when she told of the French novelists' popularity in the United States; but a feeling of humiliation came upon her when Aloza added that neither he nor his friends had received a franc from the sales of their translated books in the States.

She was relieved when the talk turned to other subjects. There was less continuity of ideas as the dinner came to an end, but the observations if not more bold in form were brilliant. Laura noticed that Aloza was a heavy eater, Bidet also; Boncourse drank many glasses of red wine, but ate moderately. Beaupassant had no appetite; he touched a few dishes only and took no wine. Mme. Bidet partook of food so delicately that her dining was almost imperceptible. Mme. Aloza's employment of knife and fork was as conspicuous as her husband's; both dined like hearty burghers. The others were liberal consumers. Creux's glass was reversed from the beginning. To Laura's look of casual inquiry he explained that he would begin taking stimulants when he shall have attained the age of sixty. People of health, he held should

not drink before that age. From sixty on wine was beneficial.

As repletion progressed the talk became more snippety. But Laura, who was all attention, was impressed by many observations emitted randomly. Alfred de Vigny was declâred to be a "mediocre mind with fine lyrical manifestations." Sarah Bernhardt had "a pretty brain without a rudder," Bandelaire was—"the quintessence of Musset;" Verlaine "the lees of Badelaire." Bidet declared there was an overwhelming dose of the provincial in Balzac which was crassly manifested in the description of modish society. He described the high life of Paris like a rustic with a dazzled imagination, as one who had never dreamed of such splendor. Bidet also observed the most trying age with children is between eleven and thirteen, the time between childhood and youth, the years of ingratitude when boys and girls are stupid and sulky, recusant and ungrateful; their movements awkward, their voices strident and transitory. And then he made a memorable analogy; he insisted that all artists—writers, painters, musicians—have that age in art. Aloza spoke of a politician, a neurotic, who was swayed altogether by his nerves. He judged through his nerves—and there were days when his nerves seemed to have common sense. Beaupassant mentioned somebody who was a bundle of expansiveness; somebody who expands before everybody, indiscriminately, recklessly. That was not indiscretion, it was self-abandonment. Boncourse remembered a thought which Tourgenieff expresses; as they grow old, great artists, the conquerors of the masses and of hearts, and very beautiful women—all beings who have lived a triumphant life—sadden, become melancholy when they feel that their power and their charms are waning. This reminded Aloza of a comparison the Russian once made; extinguished stars, extinct perhaps thousands of years, but whose luster continues, are like departed geniuses whose voices through their works we shall hear for countless centuries. We still hear Homer. Bidet recalled a less lyrical analogy uttered by Tour-

genieff: Noon was the critical hour of the day and thirty years the critical period in a woman's life. Before noon time one could not tell that the day would be fine; before woman had attained her thirtieth year it was impossible to predict her future virtue.

Although the transitions were many and sudden and the talk more and more careless and disjointed Laura was deeply impressed with what had been said of Tourgenieff. She resolved to ask Beaupassant, on their return to the hotel, to tell her more of this author. As the moment for going neared, Laura observed the manners of the company and paid less attention to what they said. These people were simple, easy, yet not undignified; they were intimate but not familiar; confidential though not to the degree of abandonment. Still there was something wanting in the men. Perhaps the defect was an assumption on her part—or the result of her birth, her way of looking at the world. Ah, a suggestion of the explanation had just come from Boncourse; he spoke of the suicide of Charles Marchal, a painter, who was found almost in rags, in a garret, without bread, a grisette of sixteen sleeping beside his cold body. He had snuffed out his light in a moment of despair. Laura thought, these Frenchmen feel too deeply on one thing. Their intensely emotional nature is focal and they are demoralized too easily through exterior causes. They lack serenity, an ingrained determination; and above all, they are devoid of that touch of Homeric indifference which allows an Englishman or an American to retain his poise in a crisis.

In Boncourse's narration of the suicide there was an incident that struck Laura as characteristically Latin—and beautiful. Just before the coffin was closed the young grisette had cut off her hair, which reached almost to her feet, and had tied it around her lover's neck. The last thing Laura remembered of the many interesting observations made at this dinner was Boncourse's reply to Hansmann's question as to when a man feels that he is growing old; age is not a thing of gradations; it does not "steal" upon one as psuedo-

sentimentalists have phrased it; it comes upon one suddenly, as a solemn revelation. Something casual, something incidental reveals it; a random illustration: —We meet a man or a woman whom we had last seen a child and not until then do we realize our sixty years.

"Does Boncourse fear death?" was Laura's first question when seated in the cab.

"No, not death. He fears for his reputation after death. He burns to be immortal. I believe there is no one you met to-night who is afraid to die, but nearly all dread old age and its attendant infirmities. Aloza has a positive terror of a loss of his mental faculties. On the contrary, Bidet has a horror of physical weakness; to be weak of limb or short of breath or dim of sight would be absolute torture to him. But Tourgenieff—"

"You were to tell me of Tourgenieff."

"He was an exception. He looked upon death with indifference if he did not welcome it. When he was ill here in Paris he wished for death. Not that his spinal trouble gave him unbearable pain. He simply did not want to live longer; he did not think it worth while. I have an idea that Tourgenieff was disappointed in love as a young man, a deep disappointment that stamped itself upon his heart and accentuated his melancholy temperament, for he was melancholy, not pessimistic. You can imagine nothing more incongruous than this Russian giant; I mean the uncompromising discrepancy between the psychic and the physical; one would think that the Creator had made a mistake in placing the tender emotional soul of a woman in that cyclopean frame, huge and rugged even for a Russian; a colossus who towered above everybody, above Flaubert himself, who was one of the tallest men in France. He was awkard, angular, his head bent forward; his voice deep, almost raucous, his feet flat and spreading, his hands bony and coarse; the thumb of a blacksmith; his beard thick, unkempt. Yet in this giant body there was a being the essence of grace, and refinement; a heart always aglow and vibrant, sen-

sitive and highly susceptible. An intellect highly penetrating. And permeating all the Slav—the fatalism of the Asiatic, the sweet sadness of the North. Music was his all in all; it was not his passion, he did not merely love it, it was his religion. Flaubert called Tourgenieff's books poems in prose. To my thinking the description is wide of the mark. To me they are musical romances; the plaintive, the pathetic music of the slave, the sad song of the Moujik whose sobs are in every chapter of those Russian novels that, when you've finished them, make you think of the sigh of humanity of which Homer speaks. For years he lived in an atmosphere of music—at the house of Mme. Viardot, Viardot-Garcia, the brilliant cantatrice and the sister of Malibran. The art of letters, in which he was one of the supreme masters, he deemed a secondary thing. Whenever he wished to convey an inexpressible thought or emotion his expression was always the same, 'this can only be told in music; music begins where words end.' His generosity was limitless, his endeavors to further his friends ceaseless. He called the attention of Tolstoy and other Russians to my first stories. He arranged for Aloza a weekly correspondence in a St. Petersburg journal. His acts of charity were almost daily and were bounded only by his income. His learning was prodigious but never obstrusive. He wrote French as well as Russian and German. He knew English like a cultured foreign resident of England; and Italian and Spanish were to him easy if not intimate. But he was simple to timidity and deferential as a neophyte. At bottom he did not like Bidet; he distrusted him. The dislike and distrust may have had their origin in the racial antipathy of the man of the north for the man of the south. And again, the keenness of his understanding, the surety of his fine perception, may have revealed Bidet's character in a clearer light than that which governs our perception of him. There certainly is something petty, something femininely envious about Bidet which broad, manly natures like Aloza and Boncourse and even Flaubert could not see."

"I believe but two of you have married—Aloza and Bidet."

"Yes, Aloza wanted a housekeeper and Bidet a companion and a literary helpmate."

"And the others—why did they not marry?"

"I cannot speak for all. Flaubert had a peculiar view of women. He prized their intelligence, their influence for refinement. But he considered them mentally feeble and ultimately destructive to artistic force. The Boncourses were inseparable. They were to each other wife, sister, brother. When Edouard died it was as if Emile had lost a cherished wife for whom he must mourn forever and a day. Tourgenieff, as I have said, had, I believe, an affair of the heart when a young man which stamped itself upon his intensely Slav nature."

Beaupassant subsided to silence. The hack had lined up among a long file of vehicles in front of the hotel, awaiting its turn to the carriage entrance. Laura broke the dead pause. "And you, why have you not married?"

He did not answer immediately. He seemed to be groping for an expression which would give his reason clearly. Finally: "I have not married because I wish to have mind and heart entirely free. I must have them disengaged and unaffected else I cannot think clearly, act wisely. Shall I now tell you why I pressed an intimate acquaintance between ourselves so quickly?"

Laura nodded.

"And you will promise me not to be offended, not even piqued."

She again nodded, fairly charged with the curiosity which her eyes disclosed.

"Of late my sight has compelled me to dictate my work. The doctor says my eyes are perfect, or, rather, each eye is perfect in its way; but they do not harmonize; they are like two high bred horses of totally different breed that will not be driven under the same rein. I was compelled to engage an amanuensis, who proved fatally attractive. I was in danger of falling in love; perhaps I was already infatuated. Anyhow, I could not forget her. She was in my thoughts, in

my nerves. Another stenographer could not expel her from my mind. Then you came. I hoped that with you I could forget her—and I have forgotten. Thank you."

"Then I was used as a counter irritant?"

"No, as a delightful antidote."

"Thank you, monsieur. I feel highly, most highly complimented!"

She had promised not to be even piqued. But her woman's vanity was affronted and withal she was shocked that a Frenchman of Beaupassant's tact had made such an avowal, above all to her. She scarce touched his hand as she stepped from the carriage; her acknowledgment of his good-night was a mere nod. As he turned away there flashed upon her mind a line she had read in *Le Temps* the other day; in a literary review a woman, a Madame Somebody, presumed the view that men authors, even those whose specific gift was delicacy of touch, had their moments of inconceivable ineptitude, grossness, stupidity.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NIRVANA.

When Laura entered Mrs. Quincy called attention to a cablegram sent up late in the evening. It read: "Sail as soon as possible. Opening date advanced. Gars." Obviously he had shifted his plans and in the shift Laura had been moved forward in point of time. What she had thought and felt that day vanished instantly; from the world of aspirations—with its hopes, high but vague, its rare joys and acute doubts, its objective elevations and subjective humiliations—she descended instantly to the exactions of her profession. A *Journal des Debats* was lying on the table. Passing Jules Lemaitre's review of the theatre, she quickly turned to the sailings. The next steamer of the Native Transatlantic Company would not put off for six days, but there was a fast boat which would lift anchor at an English port the third day at five o'clock in the afternoon. Before retiring there was a half hour's parley with Mrs. Quincy. Laura's gowns had been delivered, yet there then occurred to her a batch of miscellaneous things she wished to purchase. But before all she must engage a state room.

She was about to leave for l'avenue de l'Opera the next morning to secure passage for home when the American correspondent's card was brought up. He had just received word from the home office that Miss Darnby was to return immediately. If agreeable, he would accompany her to the steamship office and on the way Miss Darnby could say what she had to say. To whom had Beaupassant introduced her? And what were her impressions of the people she had met? What in particular did she think of Beaupassant. Had she

seen Mounet—Sully's "Hamlet"? He was an artillery of interrogations to the door of the International Navigation Company, where he bade her adieu abruptly and hurried away as if impatient to deliver himself of the column that had rapidly grown in his journalistic brain.

Yes, the English-speaking clerk had a pleasant stateroom at her disposal; on the promenade deck, away from the engines. Was she an American citizen —citizeness? he corrected himself smilingly. He noted the apparently important affirmative and then suggested that by paying a little more she could have her luggage checked right through—without examination in England—to the English dock. He confided to her that he was going to England himself by way of Dieppe, the third day. His elation at going to London seemed irrepressible, and to Laura it was incomprehensible that anyone should feel other than dejected at leaving Paris. Her dejection was mixed with unnamable sadness, when the train moved out of S. Lazzarre station; and when the domes of Val de Grâce, the Pantheon and les Invalides were lost to sight she could not control her tears. Mrs. Quincy tried to console her; she surely would return to Paris next year; her husband would accompany her next time. Paris, after all, was not far from New York; you simply boarded a steamer near the foot of Rector Street and in less than a week you were in Paris. The trip was not much longer and certainly was less fatiguing than going to San Francisco, etc., etc.,

Hope, that elusive and illusive, always deferring and ever-recurring impalpability, had not yet completely instilled itself in her at Mrs. Quincy's suggestion, when the train halted. She recognized Rouen and Beaupassant rose before her in full palpability. She did not know until the next stop, which was at Dieppe's limits, that her fellow passengers were mostly of the modish world. The compartment system of railways precluded a knowledge of the number and character of travelers. At the city's entrance the train was fairly pre-empted of Mondains and Mondaines, all having that air of cheerful indifference which is affected by people who

are or who would be fashionable. A quarter of an hour later the train dashed upon a dock facing ocean waves flashing in the sunlight. The channel craft, bright and white, looked like a blending of a large yacht and a small excursion boat; it appeared inadequate for rough seas and the considerable body of passengers who were permitted to cross the gang plank. Immediately Laura was on deck some one doffed a hat and said: "I took the liberty to reserve chairs for you, ladies."

It was the clerk from the steamship office in Paris. Laura was pleased and frankly expressed her appreciation. She invited him to be seated beside them and at once confessed that a channel voyage was new to her, that she had never been in England. He reciprocally expanded. He made the trip every fortnight. His home was in London and he visited his folks twice a month. The seasickness going over? That had been obviated. The malady had ceased with the advent of the new steamers which now plied between first-class ports. Moreover, the weather favored fine sailing. Whilst he was describing the miseries of such a trip in the old boats, Laura heard the decidedly English-looking captain shouting orders in French as the ropes were loosened for the departure. She asked if the officer was English. Yes, and the only Englishman in the crew. The sailors were French, who though they were in English towns every day knew not a word of the language and in that they were characteristically French.

Certain French officers only pretended to English. The naval college compelled a knowledge of the tongue —since the Franco-Prussian war. The indolence was of ancient date and was not the fault of France. Before the fight with Prussia every European with even a pretense of education knew French, so why should the French have bothered with foreign tongues?

Many sails were in view, steaming and sailing in every direction. Ships from the north, from the south, from east, from west. Laura wondered how it was possible to avoid a collision at night and especially in a fog. She expressed the wonder. He did not answer directly, but noted that mariners care little for storms,

however severe; did not dread the night, but were always fearful of fogs—next to fire the most dangerous element in the experience of seafarers. A singular sensation enwrapt Laura; thoughts so swiftly successive as to be almost simultaneous, came to her, of descriptions of death at sea she had read in novels, in newspapers; of suicide by drowning; of an evolutionist's theory that as life itself originated in water it should end there; instead of in the ground; she recalled—the vision was marvelously vivid—the funeral of the steerage passenger, the poor woman who had prayed so fervently that her sins might be forgiven.

"I beg pardon, but are you ill?"

The question lifted her from the somber spell.

"No, I am just thinking of a sad affair that occurred on board ship when I came over."

"You were so pale I was afraid that, after all, the channel did not agree with you."

He turned the subject. He called attention to the elderly, portly man wearing green spectacles, who had been scrutinizing passengers furtively and who had just formed the acquaintance of a young man of nervous appearance. As both walked past, the elderly man exclaimed: "So you are from Philadelphia? It's an interesting city. I've property there."

"That fellow," the clerk said, "is a detective and a very awkward one. To any one at all observant, he would be impossible. Everything about him shows who he is. He could deceive nobody except an absolutely innocent traveler. With the exception of the German, English detectives were the worst in the world."

Several of the travelers who were familiar with the route smiled broadly as they observed the innocence of both—the traveler who thought he had met a property owner in his city, the sleuth who believed he was enmeshing a fugitive criminal.

The voyage was without further incident. The clerk, in response to Mrs. Quincy's questions, suggested a hotel in London. Just before the landing he confessed his all-embracing admiration for American women; they were such a relief from the affected demureness

of English women. Americans were growing favorites everywhere in England; so much so, that society papers were coming to the defense of his country women. The foreigner was subject to attack; she was called bold, intriguing, immodest to a degree inconceivable to the home maiden. She—

But Laura was not listening. England was now at her elbow—the steamer was entering port. Something —she knew not what—made everybody inclined to move less briskly than at Dieppe. The passengers awaited their turn in a more orderly manner. But Laura realized more intimately that she was in another country when the final guard at the custom house took her brusquely by the arm and demanded roughly: "Where's your mark?" She had forgotten, in passing the gate, to show the chalked sign on her satchel.

But better evidence were the stations passed; they were tidy, some of them even picturesque, and all in the midst of well-ordered, garden-like plots. The walls separating the towns from the railway tracks were high, solid and covered with ivy, lending an air at once ornate and ancient. Mrs. Quincy was mute from the emotion which the sight of the country traversed caused her. She had not seen England since her girlhood and when she recognized certain landmarks tears jetted from her eyes. To Laura the contrast between this trip and the ride from Havre to Paris was vivid. Here, everything, even the fields, had an air of antiquity. And yet, when she recalled history, France's civilization antedated that of England by several centuries. Perhaps it was due to the atmosphere which was something between pale and gray and certainly was heavy.

They were whirled past buildings always vine clad, that looked like castles, but which Mrs. Quincy vowed were hospitals and asylums. The air thickened; cottages and mansions became numerous; rows of houses of identical architecture appeared. A curve of the track and they were in an immensity of buildings in and around which mankind swarmed; buildings low and high, squalid and splendid; mankind miserable and

happy, noble and humble, proud and abject. Laura saw this in a glance from the car window, and as the train slackened in speed the sky darkened; something almost palpably black hung over the city. Laura felt precisely as she did when she saw Chicago for the first time; it was the same feeling of depressed awe, of acute malaise, of entering a monstrous cavern echoing with noise, the difference being that in Chicago the roar was harsh, here it was muffled. The train stopped for a moment in a spot of squalor. Not many feet away a huge factory, low, long, dark, sinister; surrounding it, leprous-looking huts as hopeless and wretched as the beings who lived there; these were swarming about dejectedly—the factory was closed either for lack of orders or because of a strike—apparently as terribly superfluous in the world's scheme as scrofula. They were nothing but rags, dirt, misery. The very children —in the arms of mothers young in years, old in the experience of hunger—were stamped with vice and starvation. A group of the males hung about the forbidding station of this abandoned quarter. Laura heard voices hoarse and dead. The grimy vests open, the shirts tattered, disclosing the odious flesh of animalistic humanity. Through the car window she heard an abusive jargon as revolting as a gush from a sewer. She turned away; it was impossible to look longer at such foul wretchedness.

Two minutes later the train traversed quarters crowded with buildings of solidity and splendor, where the fleeting glance revealed people of prosperous rotundity and healthful rubicundity. The juxtaposition was confounding. But suppression seemed to prevail everywhere; sullen at the station of penury, dignified elsewhere. This suppression, this almost motionless activity, was elaborate at the Central depot in which the locomotive entered silently submissive, its steam subdued, its clang subjugated.

In the gigantic depot, lowering and somber, serried along the limitless platform were cabmen mute as posts. The clerk from Paris beckoned to one of them. He gave the address of the hotel in Trafalgar Square which he

had recommended; and delighted and no doubt surprised at the warmth and sincerity of Laura's thanks, he disappeared unceremoniously. Laura did not hear Mrs. Quincy's exclamations of reminiscence. She felt as if the world were made of heavy, orderly streets, of mutely orderly men and women—the order that proceeds from rigid laws. In Paris she could see heights, trees, water; in Paris there were vistas, gloriously open spaces; there was air, a feeling of freedom. Here streets and streets and streets; a world of stone; a world regulated by machinery which was not less oppressive because it was not wholly visible. In front of her, in the carriage, the law—in the form of a placard—told her the amount which the coachman may exact. At every square a high sign instructed the driver to drive to the left. Newspaper vendors, men and women, girls and boys, bore an inscription on their breasts giving the names of the journals for sale. The law did not permit them to announce their wares. A universe conducted by silent automata; silent animation, mute demonstrations; a city that seemed to have absorbed the whole of humanity in the few last hours; a city, in Laura's first impression, of depression and repression, of contradiction and compulsion, whose citizens had become automatically dutiful.

After miles of stone, an opening—of stone. In the center a high black column of stone. The hackman stopped at one of the buildings in the opening. He bowed his head in acknowledgment of the fare paid. A red-faced, red-liveried lackey took Laura's hand luggage without a word. The clerk in the office silently offered a pen to her. When she had indicated the accommodations required he nodded "very good" and called for a bell boy. A handsome, perfectly mannered lad, with a respectfully modulated voice that spoke an English of soothing enunciation, led the way to the lift, and from there, after devious turns and bewildering combinations of marvelously narrow corridors, opened a midget hallway to a suite that elicited exclamations of pleasure from both women. The rooms fronted the square; they were roomy, but with not too much high

light to affect their home-like quality; they contained every essential of a home and some of its luxuries and edifications, including a large, handsomely bound bible, a church directory, and a theatre guide. The bathroom was as spacious as an alcove, in which nothing was omitted, not even robes. "They are a home people" Laura thought, "just as the Parisians are children of the air." She felt that she would wish to remain within doors while in England to enjoy the creature comforts of an interior which, compared with the gloomy out-door life, was contrastingly comforting.

Ensconsed in a low, broad chair, her mind carried her back to early girlhood when she had read Dickens at home, in vacation days. As she had thought of Beaupassant the first night in France, so Dickens now occupied her thoughts. She pressed the electric button once and when the natty bell boy answered she asked if it were possible to get a volume of Dickens; "David Copperfield" and "Dombey and Son" preferred.

He returned with the "Old Curiosity Shop". American guests, he said, had taken the specified books from the library earlier in the day.

She read of Little Nell until late. She slept profoundly that night and was awakened by Mrs. Quincy next morning, who said the London correspondent of an American paper had sent up his card, and at her request would return. He came back after luncheon. A magnificent creature, superb of carriage, superbundantly healthy, straight as a post, though not stiff. He had lived in New York but was London born. If Miss Darnby would give him the pleasure he would like to drive about an hour or two; conduct her to the Abbey, to Parliament. A most agreeable way of being interviewed Laura thought in accepting. The first carriage in the long line of vehicles stationed silently in the center of the thoroughfare to the side of the hotel answered to the mute motion of the porter. A sloping street, several twists and turns and they were before a moldy and bituminous minster. The most obstrusive objects were the merry sight-seers; they were so many and so gapingly obvious that it was some time before

Laura could forget her worldly cerements and give herself wholly to the impressiveness of the interior. Even then she was forced to make a comparison of the grandeur of Notre Dame of Paris, and found the Abbey wanting. The statues and sarcophagi of the monarchial nonentities, of forgotten statesmen, of artists, literary and otherwise, whose only title to recognition was their ancientry, crowded and dwarfed the meed of tableted and statuary praise accorded the genuine English souls thus represented. There was, too, something harshly incongruous in the offer of a sub-sexton to show the tombs of kings for money; there was something trade-like in the call for services in one part of the church whilst gaping strangers were feeding their curiosity elsewhere; something painfully business-like in the routinist who went through the forms of worship in a nasal, mechanical voice and with mechanical gestures. Laura went away unedified, unimpressed.

Parliament, if not more impressive, was more imposing. It had a sweep of the river, was free of streets, had a magnificent circle of air. She separated from the journalist at the stairs, English rule did not permit a mixture of the sexes in the spectators' gallery. She was taken up to a small, stuffy, loft, screened from side to side, that looked as if it had been made for declassed creatures, for Turkish women or for that conception of women as revealed by early English chronicles. She saw very fat and healthy and very thin and unhealthy men lounging on benches; some were asleep, many were not listening to a tall and meaty, bald and bearded man, who in a fleshy voice was descanting upon the maltreatment of mine laborers. He had a mass of documents before him from which he read desultorily. His discourse was jerky, his words unspontaneous, his effort laborious, his manner unconvincing. "That was Wilke you heard," said the correspondent when she came down. "A curious compound, that fellow. Very rich, he has made it a specialty in Parliament to plead for workman, since he was involved in a malodorous social scandal, that is. He is quick to second any motion of morality which Smith

introduces. But his trouble is that he throws a mass of undigested and undigestible stuff at the house. He has two secretaries who do nothing but delve for figures, which he cannot, or leastwise, does not assimilate. Perhaps he is sincere, but the role of protector of the masses does not fit him. He should leave that to Burns."

He ushered her out on a wide terrace. It was a restful sight. A broad river flowed there and its breadth gave a considerable view of the lead-hued city. Parliament, Laura thought, was in session on the terrace, not in the house. The tables from end to end were occupied. Laura was introduced to a few of the occupants; of one, a member from Scotland, she asked why they were out there and not in the house. He answered they were conservatives who could see nothing practical in Wilke. The Scotchman, in answering, smiled shrewdly with his eyes. Of a sudden there was a mild commotion along the line of tea drinkers; there entered, with two scrawny women, a pursy fellow of huge trunk and short legs; heavy, florid face and chop whiskered—a vivid resemblance to the John Bull as typified by cartoonists. He elicited deferential bows from everybody. "That," whispered the Scotch member, in a tone in which deep consideration penetrated, "is Papsop, of Papsop's Ale, you know. He's the richest brewer in the country."

She did not know and she did not care. The men's wives interested her, in their strange contrast to the other women she had seen and known. They were all very tall or very small; all positively ill-gowned, all absolutely unprepossessing. They were either exceedingly thin or grossly fat. The thin were scrawny, awkward, angular; the fat puffy, waddling. Their gowns in most part were caricatures in fit and hues. "How can men marry such women?" Laura asked herself. "How is it possible to love them? Why, indeed, are they born?"

After this reflection she was relieved when the Scotch member invited her to go below. On the way down he remarked that the house was built of stone

quarried in France. At the first descent he pointed where an attempt had been made to destroy Parliament with dynamite; the spot where Lords so and so had been tried. It was all bare, like an immense cell. Further down there was something to attract. A chapel; pious members of Parliament in prolonged sessions covering Sundays came down there on the Sabbath to worship. An altar cloth, rich, heavy, a magnificent piece in which gold and black predominated, drew Laura. As she felt it, the member told her it had been made by Queen Elizabeth. On hearing the name of the maker, Laura dropped it. She hated Elizabeth for her treatment of Marie Stuart (who from early childhood had engaged Laura's sympathy), for her stealth and hypocrisy in love affairs.

The same feeling of resentment came over her when she stood before the tomb of "Arthur, Duke of Wellington" in St. Paul's, that gloomy house of prayer. "Arthur the Little", Laura thought, "whom fortune in a moment of blindness had allowed to conquer Napoleon the Great."

Coming out she asked the correspondent to dismiss the carriage, as she wished to walk back.

The wings of dusk were spreading over the huge city and it had seemed that their shadows subdued the more the muffled roar of the impassively animated streets. The vehicles in the roadway and the leisurely active throng on the curb thickened. The people seemed voiceless; their eyes seemed to do the duty of their voice; they looked their thoughts and these appeared to be cheerless. The pervading expression was seriousness of variant shades; canine determination; despondency, savagery, brutish stupidity, philosophical gravity and thoughtfulness. Two painted women in garish gowns passed. One of them laughed. The laughter was harrowing. A calibanistic creature with yellow eyes leered at Laura in passing. Laura shuddered. Those eyes were horribly bestial; they showed a being in whom lurked rapine and murder.

A gentle turn and Laura and the correspondent were in a lane of bookstalls. "Fleet Street," uttered her

companion. She saw faces poring over books, that swelled her heart. Pale faces mostly, young and old, but all lit up by the divine spark of superior intelligence. The name, Fleet Street, crowded Laura's memory with spirit stirring and exalted thoughts. Now she loved England. She remembered the men that kept awake the finest parts of the Nation's soul, that gave to the country better aims than conquest of trade and who withstood the sovereignty of Mammon nobly. They were the vanguards of the march of mind in Great Britain, who, amid the temptations and sorrows, the cruel and wounding subordination of pure intellectuality to material power, traveled their own way in calm majesty.

Another turn: "Strand," said the correspondent. The crowd though denser was more sullen. Now and again it uttered oaths. One fellow, whose countenance was so deeply branded by depravity that Laura could not withhold a stare, shouted: "What in hell are you looking at?"

And before the correspondent could turn on him he had slunk in the moving, grimy mass. Laura asked him why the monumental buildings looked so much older than in Paris, though those of the French capital antedated London's by centuries.

"It is the climate. The air is purer in France; it is less humid; they have more sunshine there."

"That also may account for the difference in the people," Laura thought.

They were now at the embankment, and instantly Laura got sight of the Thames, which appeared slow and squalid here, Dickens' "Our Mutual Friend" came to mind. The army of characters in the novel passed by her mind's eye, and then it seemed to her that she had witnessed a panoramic illustration of Dickens' pages since she had left Fleet Street. Small crafts, like black swollen beetles, puffed and panted up and down the stream. On both shores were a forest of masts with a background of smoked or reeking walls whose dull windows but stressed the smoke and reek of the whole. There were penetrating scents of Oriental per-

fumes; and revolting smells of Occidental filth; odors of hides and spices, of fresh, clean timber, of decaying vegetables and nameless putrefactions. Everybody walked slowly, morosely, sullenly. Even a pair of lovers, with arms about waists, were affected by the gloom; they moved heavily with an air of depression.

"If you don't mind, I had rather ride to the hotel, after all," requested Laura.

She was happy to be back to those home quarters. The closing of the door seemed a change to a world of physical well-being and mental serenity. But once out again, the next morning, on the way to the station in a densely yellow fog, the bodily heaviness and spiritual dejection of the day before came back with double emphasis. She would be out of London; she was feverishly impatient to be away, away! Yet in this feverish desire to be out of London, to detach herself from earth, to escape from her dejection, from herself, there was something of physical dehortation, something of instinctive recoil, of purely bodily premonition. And while the train was dashing toward the seaport, this singular sensation was accompanied by a recurrence of spiritual phenomena; again it seemed that all she had done and felt since morning she had done and felt before, a long time ago, in another existence, or perhaps, in a dream; in slightly different circumstances, but in essentially similar conditions; the little girl in the next seat who was staring with wondering eyes at the fleeting landscape, Laura had seen before. The mother's voice, with its caressing intonations, appeared singularly familiar to Laura's ears. The tall conductor with the kindly smile; the American who laughed at an Englishman's slip in English; the bearded man who said in a tone clearly above the clang of the rushing train: "England is the land of the puritan and hypocrite:" the glimpse of the scrupulously cultivated fields; the whitish atmosphere; the intense green of the trees clustered on low, short and infrequent hills; the penetrancy of the grassy odor when the train skirted a concave and heavily bedewed and heavily grown meadow—all had been known to Laura's senses

in time long past, in a different state of existence it seemed.

Those large blond officers—that determined-jawed captain—and those little, dark, thin, nervous and villainous-looking sailors, reptile-looking fellows who might have been picked up on either shore of the Mediterranean; that ponderous steamer, which left her dock without a cheer in almost ominous silence, consecrated only by Mrs. Quincy's tears—Laura had seen all this before. Witnessed before, also, had been the greeting just out of the harbor from a smaller boat of the same line coming from America. The incoming craft bounded in gayly. The sight of land had made its passengers exultant; they cheered the out-going ship wildly—flags and handkerchiefs fluttered gayly; hats and canes flew in the air. But the only response from the departing sail was the unrolling of a black crepe of smoke—as if the ship had been cast off by the earth and had gone in mourning.

The passengers had the air of mourners. Many were moody; some wore an air of indifference; some of chagrin; some of detestation; a few of downright desolation; all but one, Laura imagined, were shadow-vested by apprehension. That one was a priest; a young man with the dark hair, blue eyes, handsome, genial countenance and the open erect bearing of an Irishman. He neither avoided nor courted recognition. Several (Catholics) lifted their hats to him. With these he at once became acquainted, pacing the deck with them directly the ship was out of the harbor, at dusk. It was then that Laura's nerves created uncheerful reflections. A feeling of deep solemnity enveloped her. She realized more intensely than when leaving New York that she had left safety—the shore—to spend a week of uncertainty upon a perilous salty plain, the epiderm of an abyss that covers worlds of lost lives and vessels; realized that she was separated from a turbulent chasm by a plank only. She looked out at the rolling water which seemed to turn blacker with every knot; never had she so intimately felt the

narrow and quick transition between life and death. Life was represented by the ship, an almost infinitesimal speck, seemingly afloat by the grace of death, which was represented by the omnipotent and omnipresent ocean. Her strange malaise impelled her to go to the salon. On the way she went aft, and looking below she saw a group of sailors playing at some sort of a game. They—underhand-looking knaves with shifty eyes—were jabbering in an unknown tongue and gesticulating violently. Surrounding them were emigrants—apparently of the same race—dirty, seedy, who looked horribly predatory with their carniverous jaws and convex noses. Compared with that sight the sea was magic. Laura hurried along with a feeling that the steamer was full of reptiles.

At the entrance to the salon she started back. Directly across, facing the door, was a broad stairway. On either side were caryatides of ebony, melancholy-visaged, who held up coils of electric lights in the shape of snakes. The vast parlor was quite deserted. Only in the corner was there a semblance of life. There a long-haired, narrow-backed individual sat at a piano, emitting wildly weird sounds to which a ring of boys and girls danced. To Laura they seemed a wild saraband of dancing shadows. She crossed the salon in feverish haste and in again coming into the air her teeth chattered violently. Before she turned toward her cabin she caught sight of the moon back of a maze of torn, smoky clouds, rushing backward over the sky. It seemed to her that the universe was permeated with awe and mystery.

Mrs. Quincy was already asleep. "Even she does not bear me company," Laura murmured. "I'll try to forget myself in the same way." While disrobing she thought she heard cannonading. She opened the port hole. The sea hissed. The night moaned, and there was a continuous loud tremor as of incessant sobs, accompanied by something which sounded like drums beating afar off. Then again, shrieks passed through the air, followed by half-voiced roars, as if Neptune

held the waves in semi-restraint. She closed the globular window, for the sea sounds heightened her enfevered state. Once between the covers, in a reclining position, partial relief came. The organic throbs of the engines disturbed her somewhat, but they were soon drowned by dull blows which made the steamer tremble. At times it seemed to Laura that the ship soared up as if it were jumping to the skies and then fell through a void; it plunged and heaved alternately for what appeared to be hours. But gradually the shrieks, the roars, the drum-like noises and the tremendous rocking subsided. The organic throbs recurred; to those mechanical pulse beats Laura finally sank to troubled slumber.

At the hotel on the South Side of Chicago, where Laura had lived, there was a fire signal. Laura had heard it tested one morning; a dreadful dissonance of distress, of weirdness, of warning. She dreamed she was in the hotel, in the room she had once occupied, lying on the bed. She heard a thunder of feet in the corridor as of an escaping host. Her mother was at the door beseeching her to rise; and all the while, above her mother's voice and the trooping feet, were the uncanny sounds of the fire signal. She could not move. An invisible power rendered her helpless.

In this seeming struggle to escape death she awoke to a prolonged moaning sound, a dreadfully distressed appeal. She fancied she must still be dreaming, but she recognized the cabin and heard the constitutional throb of the engines. It was dark within; yet a glance at the port window told it was no longer black night without, although the air appeared veiled. She felt for her watch, turned toward the clouded light and saw it was barely half past four o'clock. That uncomfortable feeling on board ship of the moments which precede the dawn, and that inheres in those of the strongest nerves even, was stressed by a mournful sound from above. She felt an icy humidity in the air and the physical shiver was concomitant with a vague dread of a nameless danger. She felt weak bodily and mentally;

her mind seemed light, loose, undirigible; her body heavy, incapable of effort. Phantoms, unnamable terrors seemed, in passing to and fro, to touch her with their cold, bat-like wings. She thought of dead friends and she recalled having read somewhere that it was in the early morn that invalids who had struggled to live lost heart and died. With what was like a supreme effort to her she rose. Getting into a morning wrapper hastily she unlatched the window. For a few moments she could see nothing; a lead-colored fog had gathered up from the deep, that prevented her at first from seeing the high, tumultuous and deadly leaden waves. Even while she looked upon the turbulent and partly obscured waters, the scene turned to ghastly gray, the mist became transparent; the savagery of the waters was alarmingly definite. As she was about to close the port-hole she heard, as if in response to the lugubrious fog-horn, a moan-like whistle that seemed to be near. Both noises were now simultaneous. Suddenly, as if it had risen from the wild waves, Laura saw a ship in the dissolving mist. It was only a few yards away and was coming directly toward her. In instinctive alarm Laura closed the porthole.

Both signals became mute. There was the awful stillness which precedes a catastrophe, that mysterious silence of a moment before the tragically inevitable. A thundering crash; a grating, grinding noise all along the steamer's keel. The craft seemed to stagger under a mortal shock as if she had been struck and crushed on a rock. Mrs. Quincy, thrown against the partition, awoke in fright. Seeing her companion standing in the middle of the cabin white, dumb, motionless, she screamed. Laura's breath was checked, while her brain and heart together were pierced as with daggers by panic-stricken sounds. There was a rush of feet, of cries, of yells.

Mrs. Quincy leaped for the door. Laura as instinctively followed. Precipitate forms, some uttering hoarse roars, others screaming, were rushing to the stairway in a break-neck way. At the broad stairs

there was a struggle as of panic-stricken cattle; a child was jostled out of its mother's arms, a tall, thin, bearded fellow with staring eyes, tripped a woman and trampled upon another in his frenzied drive to the top. Laura hardly knew how she reached the main deck. Once there, her senses were assailed with a mind-arresting madness. Cleaving the terrible roar of the sea were the mad shouts of the ship's officers—the captain on the bridge was yelling through a trumpet—the hysterical shrieks of women in their nightgowns and the frantic bellowing of half-nude men who were stumbling and crushing and running to and fro, wholly distracted, absolutely ungovernable. Near Laura were two officers, pistols in hand, shouting orders to groups of fiercely industrious sailors toiling like demons for the freeing of life boats, now groveling on all fours, now standing up in despair, tugging, pushing, snarling at each other venomously, apparently ready to kill and only kept from flying at each other's throats by the weapons leveled at them.

Sheer helplessness overcame Laura; but with the feeling of physical desertion her faculties, spiritualized, returned. The elemental outburst around her she now saw in a clarified, intensified light; above, the clouds were rushing at each other with black velocity. The horizon seemed to have come on all sides within arm's length of the steamer, whose stern was lowering. In that narrow circle furious seas leaped in, struck and leaped out; a lull of a second and then a big foaming sea came out of the whitish mist; it made for the wounded ship, roaring wildly as a madman with an ax; then a sudden swing of the dark sky line; the breathless tilt up of the vast plain of the waters; the swift, still rise, the brutal fling, the rasp of the abyss, the dark fighting clouds closing over her head. A momentary pause and another mountain of water dashed itself against the groaning ship.

The mountain became a canyon and the ship for an instant seemed to be staggering in the depths between two volcanic heights of green glass topped with

snow. Penetrating the din, Laura heard a shot. A body, with a stream of blood gushing from the neck, fell at her feet. Then a succession of shots. A bell rang whose knell was death-like. Men ran into each other as if they had been stone blind. A reeling sailor, heavy, squat, leering, flung a lantern into an officer's face. Supernaturally agonized voices were crying: "My God, let me in—let me in! Save me! For God's sake let me in!" "I'll give you ten thousand dollars for a place; at least let my children in!"

The responses were "Get back there! Get back! Get back! Will you let go, damn you!" One woman was flung to the other side of the ship; another was struck in the face and fell, bleeding, to the deck. A horde of black grimy emigrants joined the maddened sailors in the inhuman struggle for the boats. A dozen drew knives and fought their way to a place. As the boats were lowered, without a woman or child in them, there was a stampede to the other end, where Laura saw a similar struggle was going on for the life preservers. She turned to follow, mechanically, and quite calm, when a firm voice asked her: "My daughter, are you a Catholic?" And, without awaiting her reply, the priest raised his hands and uttered a benison. He repeated this, going quickly from men and women, who in their life preservers were jumping about like caged beasts. Looking up, Laura saw the megaphone drop from the captain's hand; he fell forward as the ship gave a list on the starboard side, turning, bow up. Amidst a rush of air and water, Laura heard a fearful roar, as if it had issued from the jagged jaw of a monster.

An instant later the ship had disappeared and Laura found herself in the center of another madness. Topping the ferocious waves and in the quickly changing watery valleys were bodies and boats and rafts and hundreds of inanimate objects. Piercing the mugiency of the maddened elements were wild yells, awful appeals, harrowing moans and the lacerating laughter of the suddenly demented.

With succeeding seconds Laura's ears became deafer to the agonizing sounds of extinguishing humanity; she still saw women struck on the heads with oars, or stabbed in the shoulder as in final desperation they had clutched to loaded boats and rafts. Some of the blood of the knifed strugglers dashed into her face and imparted a terror of death; it acted as an elemental revolt of her young life. She would not die; she must not die. The pristine instinct rebelled against dissolution. She—from early girlhood a good swimmer—swam toward the nearest boat. Though she saw the distance widening she continued her strokes desperately. Something in a high wave—it felt like a hammer—struck her and sent her under the waters for a moment; it was one of the many pieces of wreckage and it weakened her exhausting strength. She was gasping despairingly when a flabby object grazed her; it was the fleshy, bloated body of a bald, middle-aged man. The fugitive contact with the ugly corpse thrilled her grewsomely; the thought that she would be like that inspired her to a crazed effort to save herself.

But as the glassy walls fell against her again and again with roaring rushes, her breath shortened and her arms refused their office. She could not go on. Her physical power was undone and her nerves communicated the intelligence to her brain.

As her muscles relaxed she had a momentary glimpse of Westminster Abbey; she saw the interior of Notre Dame and Beaupassant was there awaiting her. When she spoke, he answered in a voice that was Darnby's. Darnby lifted her and she found herself at home. Her mother advised her to go to the Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago. Protony was at the door of the church, but she passed him and went directly to the altar. She heard music and prayers. Looking up she saw the church was roofless. Christ's blood was streaming in the firmament.

In that supplicative impulsion toward her Redeemer there was a sudden flash of the dying flame, her

strength seemed ten-fold, her faculties aflame. It was the ultimate gleam. Soon her eyes turned upward and inward, sinking gradually into their sockets. The mouth, now wide open, called for air and received gushes of water. As a hill of liquid green engulfed her for the last time the light was extinguished.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 125 243 6